

Marriage & Divorce

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Main Source of Information

- ▶ Guidelines for Local Spiritual Assemblies: Developing Distinctive Bahá'í Communities
- ▶ (see chapter 11 – Marriage and Family Life, and chapter 12 – Divorce)
- ▶ If you find yourself in chapter 13 – Bahá'í Burial, you have gone too far!
- ▶ You can download at:
<https://www.bahai.us/community/resources/assembly-references>
- ▶ Any Bahá'í can download these guidelines – they are NOT restricted to Assemblies only!

Purpose of Marriage

- ▶ “The true marriage of Bahá’ís is this, that husband and wife should be united both physically and spiritually, that they may ever improve the spiritual life of each other, and may enjoy everlasting unity throughout all the worlds of God. This is Bahá’í marriage.” SWAB p. 118
- ▶ “Regard the procreation of children as the sacred and primary purpose of marriage...” WOB, p 187
- ▶ “There is no teaching in the Bahá’í Faith that “soul mates” exist. What is meant is that marriage should lead to a profound friendship of spirit, which will endure in the next world, where there is no sex, and no giving and taking in marriage; just the way we should establish with our parents, our children, our brothers and sisters and friends a deep spiritual bond which will be ever-lasting, and not merely physical bonds of human relationship.” LOG # 689
- ▶ **Marriage is desirable but not obligatory.** “In the last resort, it is for the individual to decide whether he wishes to lead a family life or live in a state of celibacy”. See KA, notes # 91

Conduct during Dating

- ▶ **Sex outside of marriage is not allowed by the Bahá'í Teachings**
- ▶ **American Cultural Norms Today:**
 - ▶ **Living together before marriage is common and even encouraged**
 - ▶ **Sex during dating**
 - ▶ **Hookup culture (very casual sex, usually with no intention of maintaining a relationship)**
- ▶ "It is neither possible nor desirable for the Universal House of Justice to set forth a set of rules covering every situation. Rather is it the task of the individual believer to determine, according to his own prayerful understanding of the Writings, precisely what his course of conduct should be in relation to situations which he encounters in his daily life." UHJ, letter to an individual, 1992
- ▶ Also see Advent of Divine Justice, "A Chaste and Holy Life", p. 30 and
- ▶ http://bahai-library.com/compilation_chaste_holy_life
- ▶

Sexuality has become a preoccupation

- ▶ “Self- indulgence, in the guise of expressing one's true nature, becomes the norm, even the touchstone of healthy living. Consequently, sexuality has become a preoccupation, pervading commerce, media, the arts, and popular culture, influencing disciplines such as medicine, psychology, and education and reducing the human being to an object. It is no longer merely a part of life, but becomes the defining element of a person's identity. At its most extreme, the doctrine aggressively propagated in some societies is that it is abnormal for adolescents to restrain their sexual impulses, unreasonable for young adults to marry without first having had sexual relations, and impossible for a married couple to remain monogamous.”
- ▶ UHJ, May 9, 2014 to individual

Engagement – choosing a mate

- ▶ “As for the question regarding marriage under the Law of God: first thou must choose one who is pleasing to thee, then the matter is subject to the consent of father and mother. **Before thou makest thy choice, they have no right to interfere.**” SWAB p. 118
- ▶ In some cultures, marriages are traditionally arranged by parents, often without the consent of one or more of the parties. Under Bahá'í law, parties are free to choose whomever they please, without duress of any sort, regardless of the cultural traditions of the families involved. **The wishes of the parents come into play after a choice is made.** Assemblies have an important role in educating believers about these matters. NSA DDBC
- ★ ▶ **“A couple should study each other’s character and spend time getting to know each other before they decide to marry, and when they do marry it should be with the intention of establishing an eternal bond.”**
- ▶ Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated November 2, 1982, to an individual believer, in *Bahá'í Marriage and Family Life*, no. 62

Engagement – period & dowry

- ▶ ▶ “When a couple becomes engaged, the Assembly, or its representatives, may wish to meet with them to be sure they understand the requirements of the ceremony and the expectations and rewards of Bahá’í marriage, as well as ways that the institutions of the Faith can be resources for them in sustaining their union in the future.” NSA
- ▶ ▶ Engagement period until marriage should be 95 days maximum (a law in the Kitab-i-Aqdas)
 - ▶ This law currently not binding in the West
 - ▶ Persian Bahá’ís, living in the West, are left to their consciences to follow this law (i.e., no enforcement)
- ▶ ▶ Giving of a dowry is binding if both parties are Persian. See KA pp. 208-209

Parental Consent

- ▶ “Bahá’u’lláh has clearly stated the **consent of all living parents** is required for a Bahá’í marriage. ... This great law He has laid down to strengthen the social fabric, to knit closer the ties of the home, to place a certain gratitude and respect in the hearts of children for those who have given them life and sent their souls out on the eternal journey towards their Creator.” Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated October 25, 1947
- ▶ **Parental consent binding:**
 1. * Whether both husband and wife are Bahá’ís or not
 2. * Whether parents are Bahá’ís or not
 3. * Irrespective of age of husband and wife
 4. * Whether it’s your first marriage or not
 5. * Your biological parents, not adopted parents (if adopted, see Guidelines for more details)

Parental Consent (cont)

▶ **Consent for What?**

- ▶ “It is not essential that the parents of the prospective bride and groom know that either of the parties is a Bahá’í, nor is it necessary for them to give consent to the Bahá’í ceremony. It is sufficient if the parents give consent to the marriage itself.
- ▶ However, Bahá’ís may not dissimulate their faith and if the parents ask about their religion they should not hesitate to say that they are Bahá’í.”
- ▶ Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated April 23, 1969, to a National Spiritual Assembly
- ▶ “It should be understood that consent to marriage is all that is required from a parent. It is not necessary that the parents consent to a Bahá’í ceremony. However, if the reason the parent refuses to give consent is the fact that the parties propose to have a Bahá’í ceremony, then the marriage cannot take place.”
- ▶ Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated February 24, 1967, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Parental Consent (cont)

- ▶ **Documentation of Consent:**
- ▶ “It is desirable to have a signed consent from each parent, but **reliable evidence** of oral consents is sufficient. Some parents freely give their consents orally but refuse to write their consents.”
- ▶ “For evidence on oral consent to marriage to be deemed reliable, it should only be accepted directly from the parents themselves or from a family member, friend, or other trustworthy third party, not from the prospective bride or groom.”

Parental Consent (cont)

- ▶ **Parental consent can be waived under some unusual circumstances:**
 - ▶ Parent makes demand of son/daughter that is clearly unrelated to the marriage
 - ▶ Parent is a Covenant-breaker
 - ▶ Child abandoned by parent
 - ▶ Child disowned by parent
 - ▶ Certified mental incapacity of parent
 - ▶ Cases of physical or sexual abuse or incest
 - ▶ Cases where the parent renounces their right to give or withhold consent
 - ▶ Cases where parental consent is used to subvert the Law's spirit and intent
 - ▶ Parent withholds consent to deprive the child the right to choose and force child to marry someone of parent's choosing
 - ▶ Parent withholds consent to try to prevent the child from marrying anyone
 - ▶ Parent withholds consent to create estrangement between the child and the other parent

Parental Consent (cont)

▶ What if consent is refused?

“It is perfectly true that Bahá’u’lláh’s statement that the consent of all living parents is required for marriage places a grave responsibility on each parent. When the parents are Bahá’ís they should, of course, act objectively in withholding or granting their approval. They cannot evade this responsibility by merely acquiescing in their child’s wish, nor should they be swayed by prejudice; but, whether they be Bahá’í or non-Bahá’í, the parents’ decision is binding, whatever the reason that may have motivated it. Children must recognize and understand that this act of consenting is the duty of a parent. They must have respect in their hearts for those who have given them life, and whose good pleasure they must at all times strive to win.”

Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated February 1, 1968, to a National Spiritual Assembly, in *Lights of Guidance*, no. 1237

“Bahá’ís who cannot marry because of lack of consent of one or more parents could consult with their Local Spiritual Assembly, to see whether it may suggest a way to change the attitude of any of the parents involved. The believers, when faced with such problems, should put their trust in Bahá’u’lláh, devote more time to the service, the teaching and the promotion of His Faith, be absolutely faithful to His injunctions on the observance of an unsullied, chaste life, and rely upon Him to open the way and remove the obstacle, or make known His will.”

Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated September 9, 1969, to an individual believer

Parental Consent (cont)

▶ Parents Can Change Their Minds

“Concerning ... consent to her daughter’s marriage: this must be given in order to be a Bahá’í Marriage. Bahá’u’lláh requires this and makes no provision about a parent changing his or her mind. So they are free to do so. Once the written consent is given and the marriage takes place, the parents have no right to interfere any more.”

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated June 15, 1954, in *Messages to Canada*, pp. 205-206

Perhaps this is another motivation for a short period of engagement (≤ 95 days)

Assembly Role in Officiating a Bahá'í Marriage

- ▶ ▶ Confirm the consent of both parties (husband and wife)
- ▶ ▶ Confirm consent from all living parents
- ▶ ▶ Appoint or approve witnesses
- ▶ ▶ Confirm conformance with all civil requirements
- ▶ ▶ Confirm that a Bahá'í ceremony takes place according to Bahá'í Law
- ▶ ▶ If Marriage Laws are broken, may be necessary to remove administrative rights (although priority and emphasis is to correct the problem if possible)

Assembly Role in Officiating a Bahá'í Marriage

- ▶ All Bahá'ís who wish to marry must contact a Local Spiritual Assembly. This may be the Assembly in their own community, a nearby Assembly if there is not one in their community, or the Assembly in the locality where they plan to be married. It is not possible to have a Bahá'í marriage ceremony without an Assembly's prior authorization. When a couple asks an Assembly to arrange a Bahá'í ceremony for them, the Assembly may wish to request a meeting between the couple and its representatives to review the Bahá'í Writings on marriage with them and to impress upon them the importance of the step they are about to take.
- ▶ The Local Spiritual Assembly does not have the responsibility to approve or disapprove of the marriage or to discourage the couple from marrying if it does not feel the parties are compatible. If one or both parties should ask for the Assembly's advice, however, it may be given freely.
- ▶ The Assembly's representatives may also wish to review with the couple the materials listed in this chapter's resources section and/or suggest that the couple participate in a preparation for marriage workshop. The Core Curriculum offers a workshop on marriage and family life and believers are free to avail themselves of that and whatever other resources may be available in the wider community.

What if marrying a Non-Bahá'í?

- ▶ ▶ **A Bahá'í marrying a non-Bahá'í must still have a Bahá'í ceremony**
- ▶ ▶ If the non-Bahá'í wants a ceremony from his/her Faith, then there needs to be 2 ceremonies, and on the same day
- ▶ ▶ Many non-Bahá'ís will have trouble understanding Bahá'í teachings on marriage, so understanding and sensitivity is required
 - ▶ Parental consent – what?
 - ▶ No sex before marriage – what?
 - ▶ Bahá'í ceremony – what? “Let’s just get married at the courthouse”
- ▶ ▶ This can be a “teachable moment” and can set a tone for respect for the faith of one’s spouse that should last through the entire marriage. The Bahá'í Faith has laws and teachings that should be followed (by the Bahá'í) and respected by both parties.

Legal Stuff

- ▶ ▶ A Bahá'í ceremony is recognized as legal in all 50 states. It is not merely ceremonial. It fulfills the requirements of both the state of Indiana and the Bahá'í Faith.
- ▶ ▶ A marriage license must be obtained within 60 days of the wedding date. Check out: <https://www.in.gov/judiciary/2605.htm>
- ▶ ▶ The Assembly secretary (or other officer) is the “officiant” but does not need to be present at the wedding. However, 2 witnesses must be present in addition to bride and groom.
- ▶ ▶ The Assembly secretary completes the information on the marriage license after the wedding and sends it in to the County Clerk so that the wedding will be recorded by the government.
- ▶ ▶ A Bahá'í Marriage Certificate can also be filled out and presented to the couple, but it is not a legal document.



Pledge of Marriage

*uttered by the bride and the bridegroom
in the presence of the witnesses:*

“We will all, verily, abide by the Will of God.”

SIGNATURE OF THE BRIDE

“We will all, verily, abide by the Will of God.”

SIGNATURE OF THE BRIDEGROOM

WITNESSES:

Certification

We, the Spiritual Assembly of _____

certify that _____
NAME OF BRIDE

and _____
NAME OF BRIDEGROOM

are on this _____ day of _____ in the year of _____

united according to the ordinance of marriage as set forth in
the Sacred Writings of the Bahá'í Faith.

ASSEMBLY SECRETARY

Bahá'í Marriage Certificate

The Marriage Ceremony

- ▶ ▶ For a Bahá'í marriage ceremony to be valid, a Local Assembly must have prior knowledge of it and have given its authorization for the marriage to take place. An Assembly's authorization is required, regardless of whether or not the Bahá'í ceremony is to be the legal one, if there is more than one ceremony.
- ▶ (there is no sneaking off to have a Bahá'í ceremony)
- ▶ ▶ All Bahá'ís planning to marry must contact an Assembly to request a Bahá'í ceremony and are strongly encouraged to contact the Assembly at the earliest possible date to give it a reasonable period of time to ensure that Bahá'í marriage requirements are met. Failing to give an Assembly adequate time to fulfill its responsibilities may lead to a delay in the wedding ceremony.

The Marriage Ceremony (cont)

What about new believers already married, or when one or both are non-Bahá'ís?

- ▶ New believers who are already married should not have a Bahá'í ceremony after they have enrolled in the Faith
- ▶ When two Bahá'ís are married they may not be married by the religious ceremony of another Faith
- ▶ “It is only when a non-Bahá'í partner is involved that a Bahá'í may participate in the religious ceremony of the non-Bahá'í partner.” Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated May 20, 1968, to a National Spiritual Assembly
- ▶ Two non-Bahá'ís, can be married in a Bahá'í ceremony provided that all the requirements of Bahá'í law governing marriage have been met.

The Marriage Ceremony (cont)

When two ceremonies are necessary (one Bahá'í and one of another religion)

- ▶ Which ceremony comes first is not important
- ▶ Both ceremonies must occur on the same day and before the marriage is consummated
- ▶ “...Both ceremonies may, if requested, be held in the place of worship of the other religion provided that:
 - ▶ Equal respect is accorded to both ceremonies. In other words, the Bahá'í ceremony, which is basically so simple, should not be regarded as a mere formal adjunct to the ceremony of the other religion.
 - ▶ The two ceremonies are clearly distinct. In other words, they should not be commingled into one combined ceremony.
- ▶ Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated February 26, 1986, to a National Spiritual Assembly, in *Lights of Guidance*, no. 1295

The Marriage Ceremony (cont)

- ▶ ▶ The only requirement for the ceremony itself is that both bride and groom repeat the vow: “We will all, verily, abide by the Will of God” in front of witnesses
- ▶ ▶ There is no minister/pastor/priest/rabbi/imam who performs the marriage: the couple marry themselves in the sight of God and witnesses
- ▶ ▶ The design of the rest of the program is left up to the couple
 - ▶ ▶ What prayers?
 - ▶ ▶ What quotations?
 - ▶ ▶ What music?
 - ▶ ▶ Etc?

OK – so you're married now

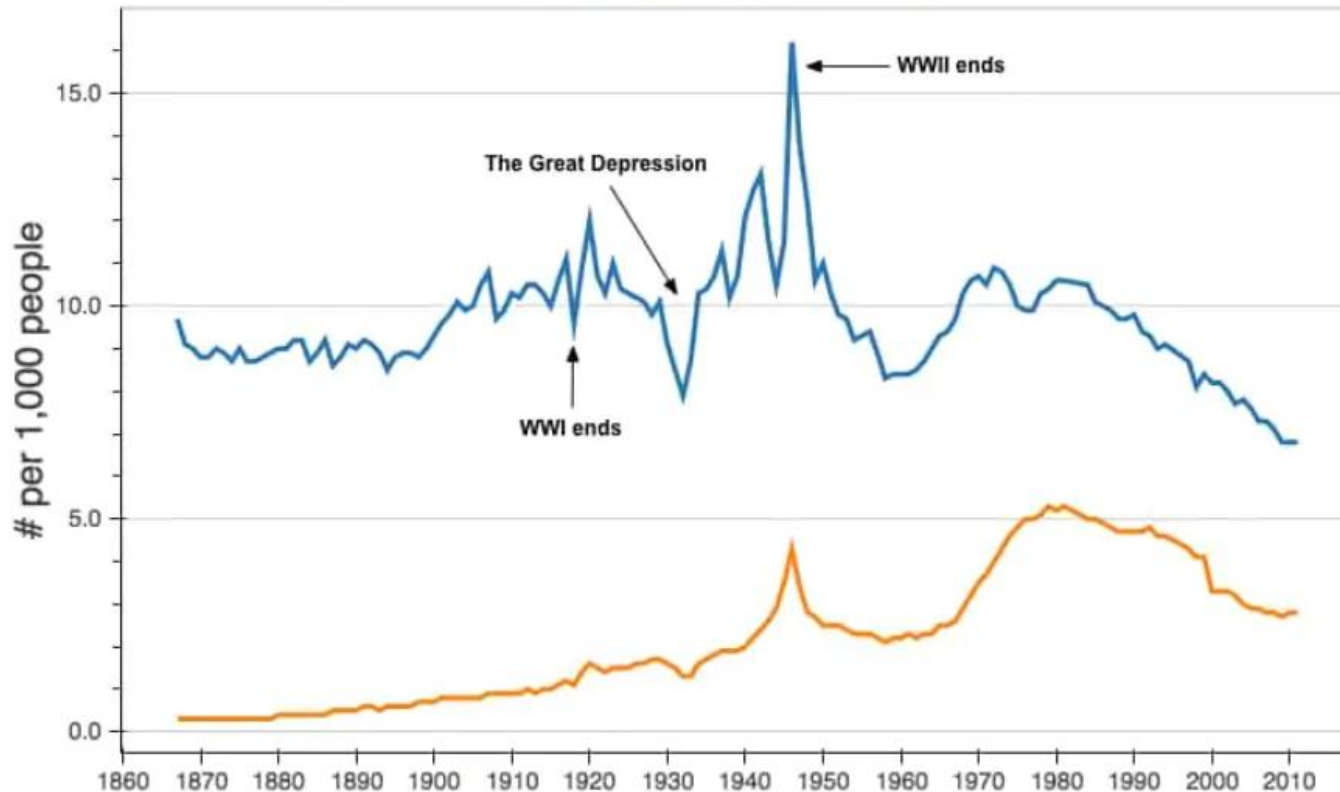
“O ye two believers in God! The Lord, peerless is He, hath made woman and man to abide with each other in the closest companionship, and to be even as a single soul. They are two helpmates, two intimate friends, who should be concerned about the welfare of each other.

“If they live thus, they will pass through this world with perfect contentment, bliss, and peace of heart, and become the object of divine grace and favour in the Kingdom of heaven. But if they do other than this, they will live out their lives in great bitterness, longing at every moment for death, and will be shamefaced in the heavenly realm.

“Strive, then, to abide, heart and soul, with each other as two doves in the nest, for this is to be blessed in both worlds.” ‘Abdu’l-Baha, SWAB, p. 122

U.S. Marriage & Divorce Trends

144 years of marriage and divorce in the U.S.



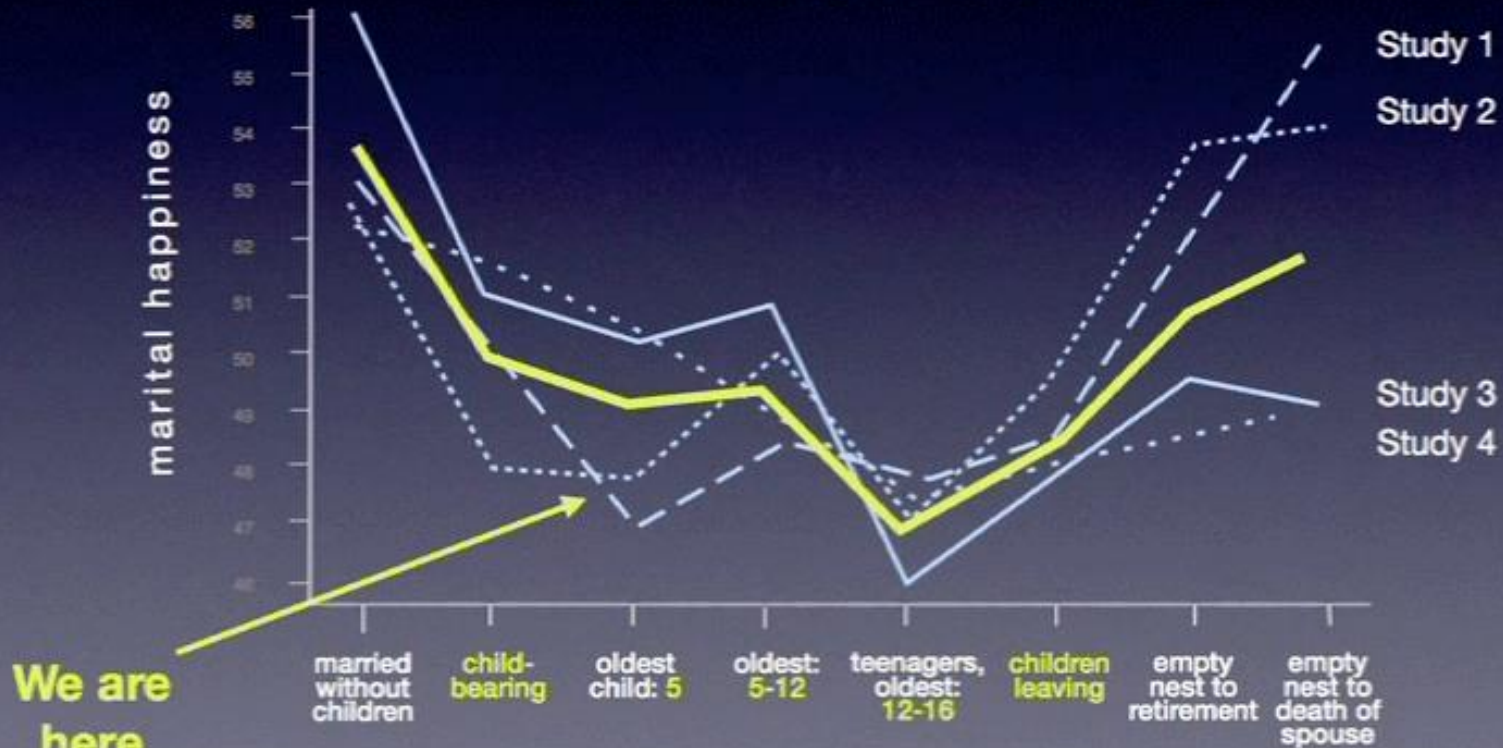
Data source: CDC NCHS
Author: Randy Olson (@randal_olson / randalolson.com)

Some things to notice:

- Divorce uncommon in 1800s
- Both marriage and divorce rates declined since 1980 (people are not getting married)
- ~ 50% of marriages end in divorce since about 1975 vs ~ 3% in 1870

Marital Happiness – Life Stages

The Most Terrifying Chart Imaginable for a New Parent



Top Reasons for Divorce

“The most commonly reported major contributors to divorce were lack of commitment, infidelity, and conflict/arguing. The most common “final straw” reasons were infidelity, domestic violence, and substance use. More participants blamed their partners than blamed themselves for the divorce.”

From a paper in *Couple Family Psychology*, June 2013

Top Reasons for Divorce (cont)

Reason for divorce	Individuals (N =52)	Couples (* N = 36)	Couple Agreement
Lack of commitment	75.0	94.4	70.6
Infidelity or extramarital affairs	59.6	88.8	31.3
Too much conflict and arguing	57.7	72.2	53.8
Getting married too young	45.1	61.1	27.3
Financial problems	36.7	55.6	50.0
Substance abuse	34.6	50.0	33.3
Domestic violence	23.5	27.8	40.0
Health problems	18.2	27.8	25.0
Lack of support from family	17.3	27.8	20.0
Religious differences	13.3	33.3	0.0
Little or no premarital education	13.3	22.2	25.0

Top 11 ranked reasons given (in same paper cited in previous slide). Study available at <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4012696/>

Top Reasons for Divorce (cont)

Conflict and arguing

Too much conflict and arguing was endorsed by 57.7% of individuals and 72.2% of couples had at least one partner report that was a major contributor to divorce. Of these couples, 53.8% of couples agreed that too much conflict and arguing was a contributor to divorce. Overall, participants indicated that conflicts were not generally resolved calmly or effectively. Respondents also reported that such communication problems increased in frequency and intensity throughout their marriages, which at times, seemed to coincide with lost feelings of positive connections and mutual support. By the end of the marriage, these respondents indicated that there was a significant lack of effective communication.

Marital Unhappiness – 2 couples

Couple 1

- “Hey, we’re having issues...”
- “Maybe we’ll ignore things, hope for the best”
- Problems/arguing intensify
- Feeling some shame here – “let’s keep our problems to ourselves”
- Problems/arguing get worse
- “I’m not feeling good about you anymore”
- Sex is not happening anymore
- The silent treatment - no real communication except for fights (we are 2 people living in the same house)
- “This marriage is killing me...”
- “I want out! Let’s get a divorce”

Couple 2

- “Hey, we’re having issues...”
- “Let’s talk it out – see if we can resolve this ourselves”
- Problems/arguing intensify
- “We’re committed to our marriage, let’s seek outside help”
 - Consult with the Assembly
 - Marriage counseling
- Restore warm feelings if able to resolve with outside help
- If not, request Year of Waiting from Assembly
- Observe Bahá’í teachings during YOW
- Reconcile, if possible before end of YOW
- If not, divorce, but avoid conflict & backbiting

Marital Unhappiness

- If you are having difficulties – don't wait, seek help
- Most couples that request a Year of Waiting from the Assembly are already at the end of their rope (too much damage to the relationship to reconcile)

Summary of Bahá'í Teachings on Divorce

- Divorce is allowed but highly discouraged in the Bahá'í Teachings
- “Irreconcilable antipathy” or “aversion” must exist
 - Can't divorce because you find someone else you like better
- Bahá'ís encouraged to seek help well before “aversion” stage
- A “Year of Waiting” must precede a Bahá'í divorce
 - One or both parties ask the Assembly to register a YOW
 - LSA's first duty is to try to reconcile the couple, if not possible, then set date for beginning of the YOW
 - YOW purpose: provide time to cool down, reflect, and if possible, reconcile their differences

Summary of Bahá'í Teachings on Divorce (cont)

- During Year of Waiting
 - Couple maintain separate residences
 - Sexual relations not permitted, otherwise, restart the clock
 - Husband has primary responsibility to support the family
 - YOW must occur, even if spouse is not a Bahá'í
 - Rushing to civil divorce discouraged as it precludes reconciliation
 - Dating is not permitted
- A Bahá'í divorce is granted when:
 - The Year of Waiting has ended with no reconciliation, and
 - A civil divorce decree has been finalized

What can YOU do?

- All (parents, couples, LSA members, etc): educate yourself
 - Become more familiar with the Bahá'í Teachings
 - Understand the ways current American culture and attitudes are undermining marriage and family life
- If contemplating marriage: take time to really study the character of your fiancé
- If parent: take your consent responsibility seriously and give or withhold your consent for the right reasons
- If married:
 - Take responsibility for nurturing and supporting your spouse
 - Be proactive if having problems – seek help and don't wait
 - Follow Bahá'í Teachings if must start a YOW and then divorce
 - Work with your Local Spiritual Assembly