



PRESS RELEASE FROM MARRIAGE FOUNDATION

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Two thirds of divorces come ‘out of the blue’ for children

New research from Marriage Foundation has found that the majority (60 per cent) of divorced couples were happy with their relationship only a year prior to their separation.

Only 40 per cent of married couples reported they were unhappy before their split and just nine per cent could be described as frequently arguing, high-conflict couples.

Among non-married couples, the proportion of happy couples before separation was even higher at 80 per cent.

Harry Benson, Research Director of Marriage Foundation, compiled the research using the latest data from Understanding Society. Mr Benson expressed his concern at the growing readiness of couples to abandon their relationships too easily.

He commented: “A solid majority of couples are satisfied with their marriages a year before they separate. Then something happens – a big row, financial pressure, wider family tensions – and they decide to call it a day and call the lawyers.

“No-one has ever claimed staying married is straightforward. My own marriage almost came tumbling down before my eyes. Marriage takes a huge willingness to listen, to negotiate and to compromise.

“The advantage of making the often considerable effort is that the children do not have their lives torn apart. For the parents too, divorce is rarely the sweet release some imagine it to be. 54 per cent of divorcees regret their break up.

“This research suggests the majority of divorces are salvageable. We need a shift away from this consumer, if-it’s-difficult-throw-it-out culture. Good, strong relationships are the surest way to make us happy and healthy, but they do require hard work.”

Former High Court judge Sir Paul Coleridge set up Marriage Foundation as a result of his concern about the impact of divorce on children. In a career spanning four decades, he saw hundreds of children suffering the consequences of their parents’ decisions.

Previous Marriage Foundation research has countered the prevailing opinion that low conflict divorce is less harmful for children. Children who have not experienced their parents arguing frequently before the separation are left more confused as to why their family is breaking up.

Sir Paul Coleridge commented: “This is more highly significant and myth-busting research. It exposes and highlights two groundless myths. The first is that people’s marriages and other long term relationships end because they are inconsolably miserable. In fact the research shows that is just not so. Much more likely is that they are fed up and bored and would like change. The relationship is neglected, withers and dies over time, sex dwindles to nothing and in the end one or other party

wants out. And I would confirm that this attitude largely accords with my own anecdotal experience in the Family Court over four decades.”

“The other myth it reinforces is the one that pretends that children do not suffer if the break up is more or less peaceful. That should not be allowed to be a source of consolation because of our earlier research which finds that low conflict divorce is potentially every bit as harmful to children as the more colourful and noisy kind.”

“The reason is that children just cannot process the breakdown of their parents’ relationships when they have no opportunity to see it coming. At least when the plates and the curses are flying their young minds can make sense of ‘why Daddy and Mummy cannot go on living together’.

“Children involved in this sort of divorce can also inherit a skewed view of relationships. They are driven to conclude that all relationships, even the apparently stable ones, are profoundly unpredictable and this sabotages their own future prospects of a loving, committed relationship.

“There are two clear conclusions which flow from these new findings. The first is that many more marriages are salvageable especially with a bit of real effort and especially with professional help. Or as Marriage Foundation likes to say many more can be ‘mended rather than ended’.

“The second essential conclusion is that parents should major on saving and enhancing their own relationship. By that route their children have the best possible chance of thriving and reaching their full potential.

“Keeping your and your partner’s relationship fresh, enjoyable and fulfilling is the single most important aid to your child’s development. On the other hand breaking up the family is single-handedly the most destructive event a child can experience.

Comment [PC1]:

“Children often blame themselves for their parents’ split. This is magnified when they can find no other explanation for why their family unit is falling apart.

“In decades gone by there was a social stigma about getting divorced. Obviously, we are well rid of that form of pressure. But something needs to take its place; a recognition by parents of their primary responsibility towards their children , but also the wider family – grandparents, uncles, aunts – all of whom are hurt in the process of a family breaking down.”

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Notes to editors:

For media inquiries please contact William Walter on 07971 441735.

Harry Benson is available to be interviewed, on 07515 699187.

Marriage Foundation was founded by Sir Paul Coleridge, a High Court Judge, moved by his personal experience in 40 years as a barrister and judge specialising in family law. The Foundation seeks to improve public understanding of marriage reduce the numbers of people drawn into the family justice system – some 500,000 children and adults each year.

Marriage Foundation has highlighted the crisis of family breakdown. Their research has found that a child born today only has a 55 per cent chance of living with both parents by the time they reach fifteen.

Foundation research has also found that 93 percent of parents who stay together until their child’s fifteenth birthday are married.

A source of statistics on marriage, cohabitation, commitment, divorce and family breakdown can be found on the [Marriage Foundation website](#).