

Marriage and Remarriage

Utah Marriage Commission

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In comparison to first-time married couples, remarital relationships are more fragile. Various reasons account for this possibility, but chief among them is that there is greater opportunity for conflict. Majority of remarried couples (about 60%) bring children from previous relationships, thus forming a stepfamily. Much like the first-time married spouses, remarried spouses need to learn about each other and find ways to get along, and on top of that, they are tasked with additional responsibility to make a connection with stepchildren. This connection may not always go smoothly because much depends on how the stepfamily was formed, the ages of children, the relationship with ex-spouse(s), etc. For example, a stepfamily formed when a child was a toddler might look very different from a family with a teenager. A toddler may not resist the stepparent's influence whereas a teenager is likely to do so because of the short history with the stepparent or loyalty to the other biological parent. While stepchildren do contribute to challenges in remarriages, spouses are also responsible for making their relationship work. In fact, scholars have identified plausible theories

as to why remarriages are more prone to distress and relationship instability.

Divorce prone hypothesis. Certain characteristics make people prone to divorce (or make them less likely to get along with others). Such characteristics may include antisocial personality, addictive behavior, or low frustration tolerance. Individuals with these characteristics may be considered as low-quality marriage material because it would be very difficult for others to get along with them.

Training school hypothesis. People think that they will learn from past mistakes, but it's rarely the case. For example, people may have learned that cheating is an unacceptable behavior the hard way because their ex-spouse left them. Although they may not have an intention to cheat again, at the weakest moment (e.g., when challenges arise), they may go for it. Or, they may engage in behaviors that elicit their current spouse's jealousy thereby creating opportunities for conflict. This example doesn't mean that "once cheater always a cheater" applies to everyone. This is just an example to illustrate that same behaviors resurface across different relationships, and that this saying may indeed apply to some people. Some people do learn from prior mistakes, but if you look at people who have been married multiple times, you will likely see the same issue repeatedly.

Willingness to leave marriage hypothesis. People who divorce have a track record of seeing divorce as a solution to marital problems. They are simply less committed to marriage. When their marriage hits rock bottom, they are less motivated to work on their relationship, and instead, look for an exit.

Dysfunctional beliefs hypothesis. Some people have unrealistically high expectations. No matter what the spouse, it is never good enough. The harsh reality is that you will never find a person who is 100% of what you want. And guess what – you will never be 100% of what your spouse wants either. However, if a person's positive characteristics outweigh the negatives – hold on to that person! Another way to put it, if a person is 80% of what you want in a spouse, and the other 20% can be tolerable – you are in a good spot.

Remarriage market hypothesis. Selection of available mates is often not as good the second or third time around. This is especially the case if remarried people have certain characteristics that make them less of a "marriage material." Also, even though divorce is common, people who wish to remarry are not out on a market at the same time, which suggests that a pool of eligible and

potential mates is smaller. As a result, people start out with lower quality marriage from the get-go.

Knowing the reasons for greater relational instability could help remarried spouses identify their challenges, and actively work to address them. For example, if a person realizes that the reason for a failed marriage is that he or she was lacking commitment, then perhaps in a new relationship, that person could pay attention to the issue of commitment (see *willingness to leave hypothesis*). Or, if the reason for relationship dissolution is a certain characteristic (e.g., gambling, alcohol abuse), then perhaps this is something that a person could do to correct the problem (see *training school hypothesis*). While any relationship is a “two-way street” so-to-speak, it is important to be honest with yourself and your spouse and face the problem directly.