

Top Risk Factors for Divorce
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Divorce is painful. No one likes it. Yet it happens as often as not. Many singles avoid marriage because of the potential it carries for a painful end. But singles who want a life-long marriage can prevent divorce before they even get to the altar. One strategy is to be aware of the characteristics that put a couple at higher risk for divorce, and make their choices accordingly.

Social scientists have discovered that couples divorce at a higher rate if there are certain factors present in the marriage. Some of these are:

1. getting married in their teens. Having a good marriage isn't easy, and teenagers don't often have the maturity to pull it off.
2. being pregnant when married. If a couple would not have chosen to marry each other if there had not been a pregnancy, they may face a future of regrets and "what if's." Further, the newly-wedded couple doesn't get enough time to bond as a husband and wife before they have to deal with the stresses of a baby.
3. coming from a low socio-economic background. The stresses of financial problems and lack of opportunities to better oneself can be hard on a marriage.
4. having been previously divorced. The divorce rate for second marriages is even higher than for first marriages. A precedent has been set, and it's easier to think about giving up on a marriage once one has done it before.
5. having lived together prior to marriage. Many couples today see living together as a "trial marriage" to see if they are compatible. They believe it will increase their chances of success if they decide to marry. However, recent research shows that couples who live together before marriage are more likely to divorce than those who don't.
6. coming from different ethnic backgrounds. Adjusting from being single to being married is not easy when the couple share *similar* values and expectations. But adjusting to sharing one's life with a mate from a different culture with its unique customs, beliefs, expectations, etc., makes marriage even more challenging.
7. having different or no religious affiliations. Couples who share a similar religious faith often find that it increases their bond and gives them strength and guidance through difficult times. Couples without any religious affiliation don't have that

- resource. And couples with quite different religious beliefs may find that to be something that divides them. It's an important area of their lives that they don't share.
8. having a parent who is divorced. Our parents are typically our most important models for how to behave. Once a parent is divorced, it makes that choice seem more of an option when the going gets tough in one's own marriage.
 9. bringing a child from another partner into the marriage. This complicates a marriage on a number of levels. The couple doesn't get to bond as a couple without the distraction of caring for a child. Also, there are mixed loyalties: who does the parent put first, the child or the new spouse? And it may take a long time for the child to accept the new spouse as a parental figure, especially if the child is older. Step-parenting puts a lot of stress on a marriage.
 10. knowing each other for a short time before the wedding. It takes about 2 years to develop a secure bond between two people. Statistics show that that is the average length of time successful married couples knew each other before marrying. If a couple has known each other significantly less time than that, they may not know each other well enough to be able to make a good choice of a mate. If significantly longer, one has to wonder how much interest there really is in making a lifelong commitment.

Any one of these situations does not automatically doom a marriage. But if a number of them are present, another divorce prevention strategy is to get good pre-marital counseling. For high-risk couples, it may be worth the investment to go to a professional marriage counselor for this service. For about the price of a wedding cake, a couple can receive guidance from a professional counselor and lay the foundation for a better marriage for the rest of their lives.

For people who are already married and find themselves meeting a number of these risk factors, counseling can also help them overcome these potential stumbling blocks.

Of course, there are no guarantees in marriage or in counseling, as there are none in life. But who wouldn't want to increase their odds of success for something as important as their marriage?

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