

LIVE

Help your loved ones deal with their divorce

QUESTION:

My sister has decided to separate after 30 years of marriage. Her husband is distraught. My siblings and I were aware that there had been some difficulties over the years but no one in the family expected this. Most of her energy has gone into being a mother and both of her kids are now launched and doing well. She has had some health issues over the past year and I can't help thinking that she is fragile and making a big mistake. Meanwhile, her husband has been calling me asking me to help and my sister is discouraging me from talking with him. What can I do?

Answer:



Your sister sounds like she is at one of the crossroads in life that many mothers experience — the kids are gone so now what? Mothers who have put most of their energy into their

children without developing themselves at the same time are more likely to struggle with the empty nest. The absence of the children can put a new focus on the marriage and the focus is not always positive.

Marital breakdown often occurs following a nodal event such as a birth, a death, a health scare or any shift that shakes up the family structure. These blips in the radar act like a wake-up call and the individual who is discontented or feels a loss of direction can begin to rethink his or her options for the future and the marriage can become the scapegoat.

You describe yourself as being caught in a triangle with

your sister and your brother-in-law, each wanting something from you and each concerned about your influence on the other. Though it may not be obvious, each individual in the couple has usually contributed fairly equally to the marital deterioration. Your best bet is to stay neutral, suspend judgment and listen. I would also make it clear to both your sister and your brother-in-law that you are concerned about and in conversation with each of them. Keep the triangle clean and open. Your support and empathy will be appreciated.

One of the most common errors that families make when made aware of a separation or

divorce is to cut off communication with the in-laws. This usually adds to the pain and increases the intensity between the struggling couple. I have worked with many clients who have felt a deep sense of loss and confusion at the silence from people they once felt close to.

At times of crisis people need support and understanding. We tend to be more comfortable offering this to others around illness or death. At such times relatives and friends show up with food, sympathy and an open heart. There is something about the specter of divorce that makes people think they need to take sides. Camps are

drawn, blame assigned and connections severed. I have never found this to be in any way useful to the struggling family.

Your sister and her husband, and their children would be best served if you and your siblings and all of the family could acknowledge the challenges the couple are facing and offer as much care and compassion as is possible to all people involved.

Margaret-Anne Speak, M.A., C.C.C., works with couples, individuals and families from a Bowen Family Systems perspective at Family Services of the North Shore. Questions? Write onthecouch@familyservices.bc.ca or call 604-988-5281.

Serious injuries require a doctor

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point of cutting off blood flow to the area. Applying compression should not provoke more pain, tingling, or numbness.

Elevation

This uses gravity to decrease the blood flow to the affected area, reducing the swelling of the injury.

The key is to keep the injured part 12 inches above your heart. If you can't raise it, keep it parallel to the ground. Pillows are a great way to comfortably

elevate the area, and to give your body some time to rest.

Although RICE is essential for promoting the healing of an injury, not all injuries can be resolved using this method.

Serious injuries, including one that takes longer than two weeks to resolve, should be brought to the attention of your doctor. Typically, muscle pulls can take a few days to several weeks to heal, whereas a minor ankle sprain may only take five days to heal, using the RICE method.

If you are an athlete, your healing time will be shorter than a sedentary person, but it's still essential to allow your body time to repair. If you can't move the injured area, or if the pain radiates to other areas, it's a good sign your injury is more serious than you think, and should prompt you to go see your doctor.

Shaun Karp is a certified personal trainer. For further information call his office at 604-420-7800 or go to www.karppfitness.com.

health notes

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help raise funds in support of clean air and lung health. Registration and info: 604-731-5864 or 1-800-665-5864 or www.bc.lung.ca.

SPIRITUAL AND EMOTIONAL HEALTH

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