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The Anatomy of a Divorce

I. Psychological Divorce.

The psychological divorce consists of one or both of the partners beginning to think of himself or herself separately from the relationship. This eventually signifies an end of emotional ties to the other partner. This divorce generally occurs before the legal divorce. Until the psychological divorce is complete, the partners are still enmeshed and resolution of the legal divorce (especially child custody and personal property division) is difficult.

II. Social Divorce.

The social divorce consists of a number of stages through which the family members pass. In her book *Mom's House, Dad's House*, Isolina Ricci has set forth several stages through which the family members pass in the divorce process.

- A. **Stage 1:** Both parents are living together. This is the traditional nuclear family.
- B. **Stage 2:** The family experiences a period of tension caused by some change in the family system or some change in the relationship. All families go through this stage and most families oscillate between Stages 1 and 2 throughout the history of their relationship.
- C. **Stage 3:** The family is undergoing severe stress. Communication has broken down between family members. One of the partners may have already undergone a psychological divorce, but has not taken official steps either through separation or contacting an attorney. During this stage many families seek professional counseling and often move back to Stages 1 and 2.
- D. **Stage 4:** This stage involves the actual physical separation where one of the partners moves out of the family home. This move is always extremely traumatic for the whole family. No matter how "psychologically divorced" a person may be, the very changing of the physical structure of a family causes enormous stresses for all individuals. Questions of economics, future parenting, possession of property and the whole nature of the family are brought up for immediate solution.

(According to one study, 80% of children going through divorces just wake up one morning and one of the most significant persons in their lives has moved out.)

- E. **Stage 5:** One or both of the partners contacts an attorney for legal representation to protect their interests if they haven't done so already. Children are generally very poorly prepared for this stage and this event causes enormous stress for the children.
- F. **Stage 6:** This stage consists of the beginning of adjustment. Two homes are established, but the family members have not yet adopted new patterns of living. This stage is often the one associated with the greatest degree of conflict and confusion in the divorce process.
- G. **Stage 7:** This final stage of the social divorce process involves the creation of two new homes. Frequently, both parents have remarried and settled into a comfortable routine. Parents feel satisfied with their lives and are able to refocus their energies as parents and in their personal lives.

Unfortunately, many families do not ever arrive at stage 7.

III. **Legal Divorce.**

The legal divorce is where this office plays the largest part in your divorce. In this aspect of divorce, the rights and responsibilities of the parties are defined through the legal process. Either the parties or the Court decide the issues: custody, support, property rights, etc. We encourage mediation where the parties are in charge of these decisions.