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**Tesler, P.H. & Thompson, P. (2006). Collaborative Divorce. New York: HarperCollins. ISBN-10: 0061148008. (269 pp.). \$15.95 (pbk); \$25.95 (hc).**

Reviewed by Barry Ginsberg

As family psychologists, it would be hard not to be interested in the issue of divorce. With only 50% (more or less) of marriages surviving, we are sure to encounter the influence of divorce in work with couples and families. Troubled families often come in with concerns about the stability of the marriage. It is common for one spouse to threaten the other with divorce when emotional arousal is high, and divorce is often in the family histories of one or both parents. We have become knowledgeable about family diversity mostly because divorce has had such a profound impact on our society and the quality and stability of significant relationships, including children, families of origin, friends and associates. The effects on children are serious and life long. Among the most significant influences of the negativity and trauma that emerge from divorce is the way we view marriage and the adversarial way our legal system treats divorce. *Collaborative Divorce* is a refreshing and much needed contribution for couples who are considering or have decided on divorce. It offers a more constructive approach that can significantly reduce lasting negativity common to the adversarial divorce process.

What I like about this book, in particular, is that it approaches divorce from a family systems perspective. The authors describe divorce as a normal part of marriage. "The truth is that divorce is statistically normal. Nearly half of all people getting married will experience it-and this rate

has remained constant for more that 30 years. Understanding what's normal during predictable human transitions such as divorce helps people marshal their strength, optimism, and other resources to move through the big changes of a divorce into a constructive, healthy way, whether it was wanted or not" (p. 19). "Here's the good news: during divorce, it is entirely normal to experience a wide range of emotions. Some of them, you now know, are part of how healthy people adjust to losing a major intimate relationship. Others grow out of that welter of false beliefs and unrealistic expectations connected with marriage and divorce that nearly everyone in our society accepts before seeing them more clearly. With the right help during divorce, you can learn to recognize and handle strong negative feelings in ways that support good decision making" (p. 23).

*Collaborative Divorce* is the right help; it provides a way for the reader to recognize how s/he might achieve a positive and constructive outcome from such a difficult process. I was struck by an insert in the book stating "Do You Want Your Divorce to be Public Property?" (p. 31). The typical adversarial divorce, no matter what the outcome, is a public record. All information, including embarrassing details, is available to the public. When the divorcing parties come to a collaborative agreement before going to court, that information does not become part of the public record.

Collaborative divorce, though similar to mediation, is more structured and can provide more resources for couples and powerful support for deep conflict resolution. Each spouse has his/her own lawyer, trained to act as an advisor and counselor to enable partners to articulate their concerns and priorities while assisting in reaching an agreement. The collaborative team does not participate in adversarial litigation but helps to reach settlement. Each spouse also has a trained collaborative coach (licensed counselor or psychologist) who helps both parties learn to communicate better during and after divorce. They also help their client to be a more effective participant in legal negotiations. A trained

child development specialist (a licensed mental health specialist) helps parents understand their child's specific needs during and after the divorce, and helps the child understand and communicate with the parents about the divorce. A financial consultant independently and neutrally advises each spouse and their team about financial and tax options during the negotiations. The consultants work as a team, setting boundaries on the emotional arousal that is an inherent part of this difficult process. With this structure and ongoing and available support from the team, a collaborative outcome is more likely,

*Collaborative Divorce* educates the reader about divorce and the collaborative divorce process. In fact, it acts like a personal coach. There is good information that would be useful to recommend to divorcing couples, even if collaborative divorce is not their preference. I have begun to assign portions of this book to clinical couples as homework. The authors state that this book is not just about differences but, "practicing peacemaking as the guiding principle for building a resilient, adaptive family system that works for all people concerned after marriage ends" (p. 245). The chapters, "Attaining the Necessary Sense of Closure," "Expecting and Dealing with Shame," and "Moving On: Life After it's Really Over" offer good advice that could be applied to other areas of life experience. The final chapter, "Common Questions and Concerns" is full of important information that can ease anxiety for those affected by the decision to divorce. The authors sprinkle vignettes drawn from their experience to further clarify concepts.

This is a book that belongs on my bookshelf and on the recommended reading list for clients and colleagues. I recommend *Collaborative Divorce* to those working with couples and families as an outstanding contribution to our field.

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