

## The 3 Peace Messages

The early stages of divorce can be fraught with miscommunication. Emotions run high and raw. Some describe this period as similar to an emotional see-saw or roller-coaster ride. The opportunities for misjudging the other partner's intentions and for reacting badly abound. And this early stage often is the most important period in the dissolution of a marriage, since it sets the tone for all that will follow.

Three key messages, if sent early, clearly, and often, can reduce much of the emotional distortion that otherwise occurs. They can establish an understanding of mutually desired peace between the parties that allows a positive process to develop for addressing the substantive issues. That is why I call them the 3 Peace Messages.

These messages all address different emotional needs, and are designed to reassure, clarify intentions, and open a dialogue. The messages are:

1. **No Fault.** This message is designed to take some of the personal out of the divorce. We humans tend to react defensively whenever we feel our person or self-image is threatened. This message conveys that no personal attack on the other person is coming, and thus that normal defensive emotional reactions are unnecessary. It is delivered by framing conversations about the divorce in terms of an "it" instead of a "who," and by specifically eliminating blame from any conversation.

Some illustrative examples might include: "I don't blame you, because I think we both did our best to make the marriage work;" "I know it has been difficult for both of us for a long time, and it hurts to admit the marriage is over;" or "I'm very sorry and sad the marriage didn't work."

Obviously, the wording needs to fit the occasion and the circumstances. The main point is to keep statements about the marriage and impending divorce simple, objective, and away from any blame or fault-finding.

2. **No Fear.** This message is similar to the first, yet designed to address a different emotional pitfall. Fear of loss is a very strong emotion that is usually prominent in any divorce. It can be fear of losing dreams, financial security, a parenting relationship, companionship, an established pattern of living, or any number of other emotionally significant attributes of marriage. The point of this message is to reassure that no unfair loss or taking is intended.

Examples of this message might include: “I have no desire to hurt you;” “I don’t want to keep you from the children;” and “I don’t want to harm you financially.”

3. Hope. The last message is to let the other partner know that a positive solution is possible. This message is simply: “What I really want is for us to find a way to resolve things with dignity and fairness for both of us.”

As with most communications, these 3 Peace Messages may need repeating a number of times and ways before they are heard and accepted. Once these messages are truly received, though, a peaceful process for divorce decision-making that accomplishes the goal of a dignified and fair resolution often is possible.

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