

Divorce

Summary

If you are married and want to end your marriage, you must apply to court for a divorce. In Manitoba, the Court that deals with divorce is the Court of Queen's Bench.

Before the Court of Queen's Bench in Manitoba will grant a divorce, you must prove certain things – that one of the spouses has been resident in Manitoba for the past year and that there has been a break-down of the marriage. You can prove marriage break-down in one of three ways:

- 1) by proving that your spouse committed **adultery**,
- 2) by proving that your spouse treated you with serious physical or mental **cruelty**, that would make living together impossible,
- 3) by proving that you and your spouse have been separated (have been living **separate and apart**) for at least a year.

To be considered separate and apart, spouses must be physically separated and one or both of you must intend to be physically separated. You must tell your spouse that you intend to physically separate, or your spouse must tell you). You can be separated and living under the same roof if both spouses are living their lives separately and have stopped describing themselves as spouses.

If the spouses try to reconcile and the total time that they have reconciled is not longer than 90 days, that time does not interrupt the year living separate and apart.

The court may not grant the divorce if it finds that there has been **condonation**. This is where either adultery or cruelty is used as the grounds for the divorce and the spouse who is filing for the divorce condoned (forgave) the other spouse.

The court may also not grant a divorce if there has been **connivance**. This is where the spouse who is filing for the divorce caused the adultery or cruelty.

The court must also be satisfied that there has been no **collusion**. Collusion is when a spouse applying for a divorce acts with another

Lesson Plan Overview

Family law is an area of law that deals with family relationships, and the rights and responsibilities associated with the creation, transformation, or discontinuation of those relationships.

This lesson plan introduces students to the concept of divorce in family law. The objectives of this lesson are to understand the requirements for obtaining a divorce as well as the difference between divorce and annulment. Students should also gain an understanding of marriage and common law relationships.

Activities & Discussion Questions:

- 1) Take a look at Statistics Canada ~~statistics~~ data for divorce over the past 20 years. Has the number of divorces increased or decreased in that period? Why do you think that might be?
- 2) How do Canada's divorce laws differ from divorce laws in other countries? Find out what the divorce laws are like in two other countries.
- 3) Do you think it should be easier or more difficult to get a divorce? Why?
- 4) What are some of the effects of divorce on the family, on society as a whole? Find two media articles dealing with the effects of divorce.
- 5) How much does a marriage license cost? What other costs are associated

party in a way meant to deceive the court. Examples could include making up evidence or suppressing evidence. Collusion may occur when both spouses act together to deceive the court, or when a spouse acts with someone who is not a part of the marriage in a way meant to deceive the court.

If there are children of the marriage, the court also must be satisfied that reasonable arrangements have been made for their support. A child of the marriage is a child under 18 or a child 18 or over who is unable to support them self because of illness, disability or some other reason, for example going to school full-time.

A divorce takes effect on the 31st day after it is granted. The spouses cannot remarry until the divorce takes effect.

Since only married couples can get a divorce, a discussion about divorce would not be complete without a discussion about marriage.

Marriage is the lawful union of two people to the exclusion of all others. To get married in Manitoba, both parties must be at least 18 years old, and must consent to marrying one another. There are some exceptions—for example, a 16 or 17-year-old can get married but must have parental consent, or the consent of a guardian or of a judge. A person getting married must have the mental capacity to do so. Certain people cannot get married, for example:

- Anyone under the age of 16,
- Brothers and sisters,
- Parents and their children,
- Grandparents and their grandchildren.

Some people confuse a divorce with an annulment. An annulment is a declaration by the court that the marriage never existed. Annulments are very rare. You must have very specific grounds before the court will grant an annulment. A marriage being very short in duration does not automatically mean that you will be able to get an annulment.

Grounds for annulment include:

- One or both of the spouses being under 18 and not having the consent of their parents or guardians or an order from a judge;
- One or both of the spouses being already married (not only is this grounds for an annulment, but could result in a charge of **bigamy**);
- Lack of consent (mistaken identity, lack of mental capacity, being drunk at the time, or being forced into the marriage);

with a marriage?

6) What is the penalty for bigamy?
Should bigamy be a criminal offence?

7) Since bigamy is a criminal offence, what about polygamy? Find the relevant Criminal Code section.

8) Provide Handout #1: *Melnyk v Melnyk*, and review the discussion questions.

9) Provide Handout #2: *Divorce Quiz*.

Glossary

Adultery – When a spouse consents to and has sexual relations with someone other than his or her spouse.

Annulment – A court order that declares that a marriage was void and never existed.

Bigamy – The criminal offence of marrying someone when you are already married.

Collusion – When a person applying for divorce is part of an agreement or conspiracy meant to deceive the court.

Common Law – Two people living together in a conjugal relationship

Condonation – When a spouse forgives the other spouse for adultery or cruelty and does not separate from the other spouse soon afterwards. Spouses can resume living together for not more than 90 days to try to reconcile, without it being deemed condonation.

Connivance – Where one spouse causes the grounds for divorce.

Cruelty – Physical or mental cruelty that makes it impossible to continue living with the other spouse.

Divorce – A court order that ends a

- The spouses being too closely related; and
- Lack of sexual capacity (physical inability or mental condition) so that the marriage could not be consummated.

Some marriages are void because they are prohibited (for example where one or both spouses are already married). Others are voidable (for example where there is no consent because of mistaken identity).

A religious annulment and an annulment granted by the court are two very different things. The courts do not recognize religious annulments. If the spouses only get a religious annulment, they will still be legally married.

Couples who live common-law do not have to apply for a divorce since they are not married. The rights of common-law partners are not exactly the same as the rights of married partners. Common-law partners may have to share their property if they register their relationship with the Common Law Registry at the Vital Statistics Agency. Even if they have not registered their relationship, they may also have to share their property under provincial law called *The Family Property Act*, if they have lived together for three years. Some pensions may be shareable, after living together for one year. Common law partners who live together after their child is born both have the right to make important decisions about the child and have the same obligation to support their children as married partners do. Spousal support may be payable when a common law couple separates if the couple has lived together for three years, or if the couple has lived together for one year and has a child together.

marriage.

Reconciliation – Resuming with the marriage after a separation. Spouses can reconcile for a period or periods totaling not more than 90 days without having the one year separate and apart period of time disrupted.

Relevant Law:

Federal Legislation:

Divorce Act - sections 2(1), 3(1), 8, 11, 12

Civil Marriage Act - section 2, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 4

Criminal Code of Canada - sections 290 and 291

Provincial Legislation:

The Marriage Act - section 18, Schedule A

The Vital Statistics Act - section 13.1

The Family Property Act - section 1