

CONCEPT

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

What are the elements of an acceptable understanding of marital breakdown? A coherent view has four essential characteristics:

1. It must recognize that both partners acted in ways that were both helpful and harmful, with neither being absolutely good or entirely bad. Every coherent account must start by acknowledging that both partners contributed to both the good and the bad in the marriage.
2. It must acknowledge that each person's behavior was determined much more by the relationship than by external forces such as friends, in-laws, or job pressures. Every coherent account must stress the role that each partner played in creating both the positive and the negative behaviors of the other.
3. It must accept that while outside factors may influence the relationship, partners can work together to meet the challenges they face. Every coherent account must identify ways in which the couple cooperated and ways in which they could have worked together better to meet challenges posed by external forces.
4. It must be free of an effort to describe partners' behaviors in terms of general personality traits (such as "He was lazy" or "She was selfish"). Instead, every coherent account must stress the actions that each person took under various circumstances rather than focusing on traits that each person brought to the union.

QUESTIONS IN COMING TO TERMS

What attracted you to each other when you met?

What are the ghosts of times past that still haunt you?

What led each of you to decide to marry?

What did you each do to make the marriage work?

How did you each contribute to its failure?

What still makes you feel angry? How might you have contributed to the situation?

What still makes you feel guilty? How might your partner have contributed to the situation?

What did the experience teach you about yourself that will put you in a better position to have greater success?