

A how-to for 'the big D'

At 'D'aisy Camp, 'D' is for divorce, decisions, and new directions

By Andy Steiner

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Chris Jordan's son was 8 years old when she and her husband decided to get a divorce.

"It was an incredibly stressful time for all of us," Jordan recalls. "I remember thinking, 'I've never been divorced before. What do I do next?' I honestly had no idea what to do. My ex-husband and I both wanted the best for our son, but we were totally in the dark about how to do that. I honestly didn't know where to start."

Then, Jordan read about "D"aisy Camp, an innovative new program designed to help women who are going through a divorce learn about the legal, financial, and emotional support options available to them when dissolving a marriage.

Jordan signed up right away.

"There are a million resources that tell you about how to get married," she says, "but there are not a lot of resources for trying to figure out how to get divorced. Divorce is still looked upon as a negative thing in our society. In fact, the whole process feels shameful. We don't grow up thinking, 'Someday I'm going to get divorced,' so if it ever happens to us we are totally unprepared."

That sense of shame and the lack of useful information about divorce was the very reason founder Jennifer Morris came up with the idea for "D"aisy Camp.

"When I got divorced, I didn't know what to do, either," explains Morris, whose own marriage ended in 2005. "I went to the Yellow Pages and found a lawyer because that's what I figured you did. I made a quick decision because I wasn't emotionally prepared to think about my options. Nobody is emotionally prepared when they're in the middle of it. Nobody talks about the nuts and bolts of getting divorced. That's why I figured we needed something like 'D'aisy Camp."

Morris, an Eden Prairie-based real estate agent, organized the first "D"aisy Camp in March 2006 for a group of friends and acquaintances whose marriages were breaking up. She researched divorce processes and support networks, and invited lawyers, therapists, and other professionals to come and speak at a weekend retreat. The response from participants and presenters was so

enthusiastic that Morris has held seven "D"aisy Camps since, some one-day events, and other three-day weekend camps held at Emma Krumbie's hotel and conference center in Belle Plaine.

Morris explains that she chose the name "D"aisy, "because people were always talking about 'the Big D' with such embarrassment. When you get divorced, you feel like you walk around with this big scarlet D on your head. The name 'Divorce Camp' just sounded awful. I wanted to take the D and turn it into something hopeful."

At the weekend "D"aisy camps, participants can choose from a variety of presentations, including "Co-Parenting Forever," "Legal School 101," "Financial Nuts and Bolts," "Divorce Without Children as Casualties," "Divorce After Decades," "Fearless Living," and "Dreaming of New Possibilities."

The range illustrates just how much there is to learn about divorce. Morris says she hopes participants can use the information they glean to make the process as fair and painless as possible.

That's just what Jordan did. She had interviewed lawyers but was concerned that their focus would be "arguing about petty things." At "D"aisy Camp, she learned about a nonadversarial approach to legal proceedings called collaborative law.

With the help of a mediation specialist, the couple created a legal document called a parenting plan. "This took many months of working through," Jordan recalls. "It was not an easy process, but it was worth it. We discussed what we wanted and what was in the best interest of our son." The specialist helped Jordan and her ex agree on big things, like what holidays their son would spend with which parent, and smaller things, like how the couple would handle homework and overnights at friends. The finished parenting plan became part of the divorce decree.

"The focus was on our son," Jordan says. "We wanted to make sure things stayed as normal as possible and that we continued to parent him in the way we had done for many years. I'm not saying it hasn't been hard, but our son has been very great through this process. The way we handled it helped him a lot."

The "D"aisy Camp experience made such a difference in Jordan's life that she's since volunteered at other "D"aisy events. When she's greeting participants at the door, women often tell her that they're concerned that the camp is going to be too touchy-feely. She tells them she knows where they're coming from.

"A lot of women worry that they're going to spend the whole weekend sitting around holding hands and singing 'Kumbaya' and crying," Jordan says. "When you've got kids and you're going

through a divorce, you don't have time for that kind of stuff." While there usually is some crying (and plenty of emotional support) at "D"aisy Camp, Jordan says most participants come away satisfied that the event was packed with practical advice.

The idea of a camp for women going through divorce "is a phenomenal thing," says Ron Ousky, an Edina-based collaborative attorney and mediator who leads "D"aisy Camp's "Legal School 101" presentation. "People so often stumble into divorce without understanding their options," Ousky says. "Without the right kind of information, you can make bad choices, and when it comes to divorce, bad decisions can impact you and your children for the rest of your lives."

Jordan walked into "D"aisy Camp feeling like her world would never be the same. She walked out realizing that, though life would never be the same as it was for her and her son before the divorce, it could still be good.

"I left "D"aisy Camp feeling like I got my power back," says Jordan. "I felt powerless when I walked in. I didn't know where to start. But when the weekend was over, I felt like, 'I can do this. I've got resources. I'm not alone.' I knew my son and I were going to come out of this OK."

Andy Steiner is a St. Paul writer and author of *Spilled Milk: Breastfeeding Adventures and Advice from Less-than-Perfect Moms*.