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### Divorces hit Tampa Bay the hardest



The divorce rate in Tampa Bay is now the highest in Florida at 15.9 percent, and it is one of the highest in the country.

By Chris Hopper, Reporter  
Last Updated: Friday, August 19, 2011  
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**TAMPA BAY** -- Most people have occasional spats with their significant other, but unfortunately those little disagreements seem to be turning into much more.

The divorce rate in Tampa Bay is now the highest in Florida at 15.9 percent, and it is one of the highest in the country.

Those numbers mean many people's dream of growing old with their spouse is ruined.

Dr. Harriet Raitano said before you know it, relationships can change forever.

"They've lost their way. What they have to do is get behind those patterns and learn how to go forward," said Dr. Raitano.

If they cannot change, they go from Dr. Raitano's couch to divorce attorney Dominic Baccarella. He said there are a lot of divorces in the Tampa Bay area, and many of them are caused by money problems.

"The average divorce is a marriage of about seven years, two children, two car payments, a home that's upside down," said Baccarella, "and we have credit card debts on the average between \$20,000 and \$50,000 for these two people."

Dr. Raitano said financial stress is almost as damaging as cheating.

"When you are under stress and you don't know if you are going to be able to keep your house or put your kids back in school, that puts undue stress and people start panicking," Raitano said.

The cost of the high divorce rate isn't just a personal problem.

When people can't afford legal fees and get bogged down in the finances of a split they can end up in welfare.

That's a bill taxpayers end up paying, and experts said divorce costs the U.S. billions of dollars every year.

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