

# divorce guide magazine

Guidance for every step of rebuilding,  
emotionally, financially, and practically.

*published by Fresh Starts Registry*

**“I’m Being Asked to Sign  
Papers I Don’t Understand”**  
What to do and how not to panic

**What to Do If Your Spouse Is  
Draining Accounts During Divorce**

**Jenny Says So: The Divorce  
Announcement Dilemma**

**Beneficiary Designations**  
Why divorce is the right time to review them

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## Divorce Guide Magazine

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## Our Mission

At Divorce Guide Magazine, our mission is simple: to bring clarity, compassion, and community to one of life's most disorienting transitions. We believe that divorce deserves thoughtful guidance, stigma-free conversations, and accessible support. Our goal is to empower readers with knowledge, language, and perspective — so you can move through this season with confidence, dignity, and a sense of possibility. Fresh Starts exists because nobody should have to rebuild their life alone.

### Disclaimer

Divorce Guide Magazine is an educational and informational publication designed to support individuals navigating divorce and major life transitions. The content in this magazine is not intended to serve as legal, financial, mental health, or therapeutic advice. Nothing in these pages should be interpreted as a substitute for professional guidance from a licensed attorney, therapist, accountant, or other qualified expert.

Every divorce is unique. Readers are encouraged to seek individualized advice from professionals who understand their specific circumstances.

While we strive for accuracy and up-to-date information, laws, policies, and professional standards change, and Fresh Starts, Inc. makes no guarantees regarding the completeness or reliability of the information provided. The views expressed by contributors are their own and do not necessarily reflect the viewpoints of Fresh Starts, Inc.

This magazine is created with compassion, intention, and care — but it is not a replacement for a legal strategy, a mental health plan, or personalized professional support.

For more resources, expert guidance, and community support, visit [freshstartsregistry.com](http://freshstartsregistry.com).

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# ***Divorce Isn't a Solo Sport***

When your life is being rebuilt, redesigned, or completely reimaged...you deserve more than advice.



## **You deserve a team.**

### **The Fresh Starts Expert Guide**

Your curated roster of divorce-savvy pros:

Therapists. Coaches. CDFAs. Lawyers. Mediators. Realtors.



Career strategists. Parenting specialists. Healing practitioners. The people who help you stabilize, strategize, and start again. We hand-select every expert for compassion, clarity, and credibility. No guesswork. No overwhelm. No “you’ll figure it out.” Just a vetted crew who actually understands what this season feels like.



### **Why it matters**

Because divorce is *logistical*. Because divorce is *emotional*. Because divorce is a *thousand decisions* you shouldn’t have to make alone.

*Because the right team turns chaos into a roadmap.*



### **Your next chapter starts with just one click**

Build your hype team. Find your people. Start your fresh start.



**Browse the Expert Guide**



## **Fresh Starts Registry**

**This is support. Reimagined.**

# February Events from Fresh Starts

*Fresh Starts Registry presents*  
**Fresh Starts for Adult  
Children of Divorced Parents**



*with*  
**Madisen Rose,  
Somatic Coach**

**March 4  
at 1:00 PM EST**

[Madisen Rose of Better Half to Whole](#) is joining Fresh Starts Registry to host: Fresh Starts for Adult Children of Divorced Parents, March 4 at 1:00 PM EST. Learn more and sign up [HERE!](#)

Mar 4, 2026

*Fresh Starts Registry presents*  
**Understanding Your Divorce Options  
—and How to Choose the Right Path**



*with*  
**Lisa McNally,  
Divorce Strategist**

**March 11 at  
11:00 AM EST**

[Lisa McNally, Divorce Strategist](#) is joining Fresh Starts to host: Understanding Your Divorce Options—and How to Choose the Right Path on Wednesday, March 11 at 11:00 AM EST EST. Learn more and sign up [HERE!](#)

Mar 11, 2026

*Fresh Starts Registry presents*  
**What the Heck Is Mediation  
(and Will It Work for Us)?**



*with*  
**Allison McFadden,  
Mediator, Attorney & Coach**

**March 18  
at 01:00 PM EST**

[Allison McFadden, Divorce Coach](#) is joining Fresh Starts to host: What the Heck Is Mediation (and Will It Work for Us)? on Wednesday, March 18 at 01:00 PM EST. Learn more and sign up [HERE!](#)

Mar 18, 2026

*Fresh Starts Registry presents*  
**Using Music to Reclaim Your  
Voice After Divorce**



*with*  
**Demaree Hill,  
Voice & Acting Coach**

**March 25 at  
12:00 PM EST**

[Demaree Hill, Voice & Acting Coach](#) is joining Fresh Starts to host: Using Music to Reclaim Your Voice After Divorce on Wednesday, March 25 at 12:00 PM EST. Learn more and sign up [HERE!](#)

Mar 25, 2026

# *A Letter from Our Editor*

Genevieve “Jenny” Dreizen

## *Let’s Exhale Together*

March always feels like the month where the world starts to exhale.

It’s the subtle shift you don’t fully notice until you do—light lingering in the afternoon, windows cracked open “just for a minute,” a sudden urge to clear a surface, sort a drawer, make a plan. March is movement. Not the loud, cinematic kind. The quiet kind. The kind that happens when you’re ready to stop holding your breath.

And when I think about movement—real movement, the kind you have to choose again and again—I think about my sister, Olivia.

If you know anything about what we do, you probably know the headline version: we built this work because we lived it. But the behind-the-scenes version is smaller and truer. It’s Olivia sitting at a kitchen table doing the math nobody wants to do.

It’s Olivia making a list titled “What I can do today” when her nervous system is begging her to do nothing at all. It’s Olivia being a mom, being a professional, being a person in grief—and still finding ways to put language to the moment so other people feel less alone inside it.

People talk about divorce like it’s one decision. One conversation. One filing. One big dramatic scene.

But what I’ve watched Olivia live—and what I suspect you’re living, too—is that divorce is actually a hundred tiny decisions that you make while you’re tired. It’s the slow work of untangling. It’s the bravery of choosing clarity over confusion, even when clarity hurts. It’s the repeated act of saying: I am allowed to change my life.

March is the perfect month to talk about that because March doesn’t demand that you transform overnight.

March doesn’t shame you for being in process.



March simply asks: What's ready to move? What's ready to be seen? What's ready to be sorted—gently, honestly, at your pace?

That's why this issue is about the practical things that often carry the most emotional weight.

We're talking about the "stuff," yes—but we're also talking about what the stuff represents. The home. The accounts. The routines. The invisible labor. The sentimental objects that feel like proof of a life you built. The paperwork you avoid because it makes everything feel real.

And we're doing it the way Olivia does it: with language that tells the truth and holds your hand.

Because here's what Olivia understands instinctively: you can't divide what you can't see. You can't advocate for yourself around assets, budgets, custody schedules, or support needs if everything is still a blur. So this month is an invitation to bring things into focus—without panic, without perfection, without trying to become a different person just to survive this.

If you're early in your divorce journey, I hope this issue feels like a flashlight. Not a verdict. Not a push. Just a little light: Here's what this means. Here's what matters. Here's what to ask. Here's how to take one step without spiraling.

And if you're later in the journey—if you're rebuilding, reorganizing, reinventing—I hope it feels like company. A reminder that progress doesn't always look like confidence. Sometimes progress looks like reading one article and finally understanding what a term means. Sometimes progress looks like making one phone call. Sometimes progress looks like throwing out a folder you no longer need because that chapter is closed. March is often when people start to feel the first flicker of: Maybe I can do this.

Not in a forced, inspirational way. In a real way. The kind that still includes tears, still includes fear, still includes unanswered questions. But also includes movement.

So wherever you are right now—messy middle, quiet beginning, exhausted aftershock—I want you to hear this clearly:

You don't have to do everything this month. You just have to do the next true thing.

Also while we're talking about Olivia, it feels notable to let you know her birthday is this month (March 15!) so if you get a chance wish her a happy birthday.

With love and one step at a time,



**Co-Founder of Fresh Starts Registry  
Editor, Divorce Guide Magazine**

# Happy Birthday, Olivia!



# *A Marriage Miranda*



by Tracy Galloway of The Divorce Bootcamp

[Learn more about The Divorce Bootcamp](#)

“You have the right to remain silent....” Everybody is familiar with that ubiquitous line from a criminal justice series on television and could recite at least the beginning sentences of the “Miranda” warning. This warning is a series of statements that must be given by the police to anyone being taken into police custody. They are derived from *Miranda v. Arizona* (1966), a United States Supreme Court decision in which the Court found that a defendant had been deprived of his Constitutional rights (specifically his Fifth Amendment “privilege against self-incrimination”) when he was not given full and effective notice of his rights. Following that decision, law-enforcement officers were required to educate citizens at the very moment that the police were arresting them. Here are the words that must be recited:

1. You have the right to remain silent.
2. Anything you say can and will be used against you in a court of law.
3. You have the right to talk to a lawyer and have him/her present with you while you are being questioned.
4. If you cannot afford to hire a lawyer, one will be appointed to represent you before any questioning if you wish.
5. You can decide at any time to exercise these rights and not answer any questions or make any statements.

Then:

Do you understand each of these rights as I have explained them to you?

Having these rights in mind, do you wish to talk to us now?

Thus, in order to be interviewed any further, a defendant must first choose to waive his/her rights;

otherwise, no interview may proceed.

Consequently, our federal and state governments have the responsibility of not only “playing fair,” even while enforcing laws, but further, of educating the very citizens that they are in the process of investigating, while enforcing the law. These dual roles of government entities, the roles of Enforcer and Educator, are complicated, tense, and often contradictory in operation. But there is one arena in which there appears to be a distinct lack of education at the critical moment - the application for a license to marry.

The “right to marry” has been protected under our Constitution, triggering rights and responsibilities of enforcement when dealing with the citizenry. But there is a stunning lack of information communicated to couples about the affirmative rights that they already possess, before taking the steps to diminish those rights. Just as the accused are warned they have a right to remain silent, to withhold their words and refrain from giving the government any further advantage, may I suggest that couples applying for a marriage license could be similarly advised? Shouldn’t the responsibility of the government include an educational component, prior to delivering a “license,” as to what rights these individuals possess, before being relinquished? I am suggesting here that, given the stakes involved, and the agonizing price paid by individuals and families when marriages fail, that state government should be asked to educate citizens at the moment of application for a marriage license.

Based on over thirty-three (33) years of practicing divorce law, plus seven (7) years as a Justice of the Peace, I have observed that people rarely, if ever, have even a rudimentary understanding of the laws to which they voluntarily subject themselves when

they get married. And why would they? Human beings are understandably driven by feelings in the first instance. People in love are under the influence of powerful neurotransmitters, hormones and the physiology of pleasure that has been designed by evolution to ensure our reproduction and survival. Which is not to say that people in love are incapable of making good decision .... but without a point of interception at which education is made available, the more logical part of the brain, (the prefrontal cortex ) is left untended, sometimes trampled by the momentum of wedding planning, rather than encouraged to build the architecture of a marital and family relationship that will withstand pressures over time.

City halls hand out marriage licenses like candy, with no pamphlets on the wall about what marriage means, nor mandated training on what happens to your money and your children by the act of marriage. There are no marriage courses required, no secular equivalent of the Catholic Church's Pre-Cana equivalent offered, much less mandated, by the state. (While there are plenty of premarital counseling books or courses out there, none of them are mandated when applying for a marriage license.) Similarly, filing a divorce action only requires one of the two spouses' desire to do so, nothing else. (fn. 1 = In three states only [Arizona, Arkansas, and Louisiana], a legally distinct category of marriage called "covenant marriage" is available, a type of marriage that has more vigorous requirements to both enter and to exit, including premarital counseling, and divorce granted only for limited statutorily defined reasons.)

In another example of education and enforcement: the state has a public safety interest in educating prospective drivers of the inherent risks when operating a vehicle on public roads. Doesn't it seem ironic that the state requires thirty (30) hours of driver's education, and a further eighteen (18) hours of instruction in a training motor vehicle, but zero (0) training or education on the consequences of getting married? Think about this: if marriage fails, the participants cannot "give up" their license, but rather, they need the approval of a judge in a court in order to get out? Nor are citizens educated on what the law requires a judge to consider before deciding what will happen to their home, children, and

money? It borders on the ludicrous that people are offered no education about what they are relinquishing of their financial and emotional freedom.

Even the Massachusetts Department of Children and Families, when investigating an allegation that a child may have been abused or neglected, behave just like the police; the social worker, poised at the threshold with the power to make an emergency removal of the children in the home, hands a parent a pamphlet explaining their rights. Another ironic example: divorcing couples in Massachusetts are mandated to take a course on how to be better co-parents after divorce. But before they marry and have children? No such luck. State government should really become more invested in and more responsible for educating its citizens, by giving notice and education to citizens on the legal consequences of marriage.

Does this suggestion seem anti-marriage? I hope not. Make no mistake, I admire family and friends who have built lasting marriages. I have observed beautiful examples of deep love and commitment, and the tremendous work involved in facing and overcoming the innate challenges. But successful long-term marriages are rare exceptions. Very few people of my age have been married over 20 years who would describe the marriage as "happy." Many who remain married are contemplating divorce. As soon as one party files for divorce, and both spouses begin to learn what is involved, those next moments are the ones that I would like to think that my divorce-professional peers might agree are some of the most painful: the moments I speak of are the ones when our clients begin to realize that everything they hold dear may be in the hands of a judge, a stranger, a third-party human being who may or may not be having a good day (or, as one may even more vividly imagine, a human being who might be over-caffeinated, or under-medicated, or who may be experiencing their own significant family drama.) The word I use to describe this moment is "shell-shocked." My clients' eyes, when they realize that they may have no control over their home, their children, and their money, even their future, reflect trauma, harm that might be mitigated by even a fraction of a degree if the government issuing marriage licenses had provided education, and encouragement for better planning.

Perhaps the time has come to shift how our society continues to favor weddings and receptions and showers, when the benefits no longer necessarily outweigh the detriments. State-facilitated education could potentially influence couples to learn more, to reconsider the steps to be taken before getting married, and to engage in further dialogue about mutual goals, and agreement regarding what assistance (including professional assistance) they might seek if they experienced difficulties. And if marriages still fail, at least our clients might be less shell-shocked by the process of divorce, had they been forewarned. If our government could provide a basic but compelling level of education that was designed to appeal to the rational mind, to penetrate the powerful romantic and sexual bonding of a relationship, then we might see an improvement in the quality of decision-making, and, potentially, less divorce throughout our population. If that aspiration is too ambitious, then perhaps we could hope for less shell-shock, and a more balanced management of the broken contract, should the marriage fail. If only citizens could hear and read, at the time of application for a license to marry, a version of a Marriage Miranda offered to them:

- You have the right to partner with another adult without applying for a license and without directly involving your state or federal government.
- You have the right to enjoy a consensual sex life, without getting married.
- You have the right to live together, buy property together, enter contracts together, purchase insurance together, name each other as beneficiaries on accounts, and/or procreate and birth and parent children together (subject to the laws regarding your rights and responsibilities toward each other and such children), all without getting married;
- You have the right to celebrate your partnership with a big party, at which you receive gifts, without getting married.
- You have the right to exchange and wear rings, symbolizing your commitment to each other, without getting married.
- If you choose to voluntarily give up these rights, and apply for and use a license to marry, then anything you own, earn, birth, build or create during the course of your marriage can and will

- be subjected to court scrutiny and divided “equitably” (which means potentially unevenly) in a court of law, including over your objection, should your marriage fail, for any reason.
- You have the right to speak to a lawyer of your choosing, about marriage, children, divorce and custody law, and the potential financial and custody outcomes, should a marriage fail, and you have to present your life and wishes to a judge for approval;
- If you cannot afford to hire a lawyer, you can request a consultation with a volunteer attorney through your local Bar Association.

And then, the Waiver:

**WAIVER –**

Do you understand each of these rights I have explained to you?  
Having these rights in mind, do you wish to proceed with applying for a marriage license?

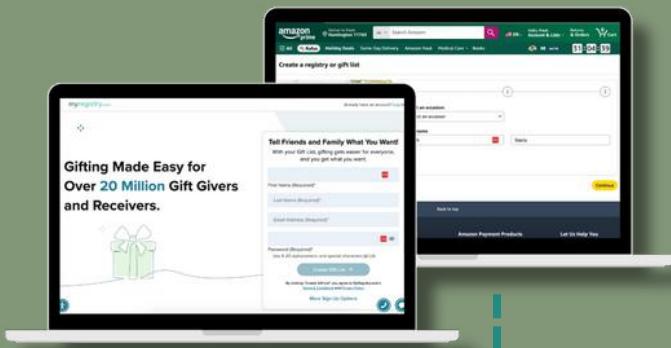
*Originally written March 3, 2021*

Tracy D. Galloway, Esq., M.A.

# Build Your Divorce Registry with Fresh Starts Registry

Start here

Start a registry with Amazon (you can hide your address!) or MyRegistry



Add the items you need to rebuild and start fresh.



Use our scripts to share your registry with friends and family.

Grab the scripts

Share your registry with the Registry Fairy and she might just support you with something from off your registry.



Definitely NOT the Registry Fairy

Get supported by your community during your time of rebuild!

## EXPERT FEATURE

# *Lisa Lisser*

*Divorce Coach*

At Fresh Starts, we're proud to spotlight the incredible professionals who guide people through one of life's most challenging transitions: divorce. Today, we're featuring Lisa Lisser, a Divorce and Coparenting Coach, whose work helps clients find clarity, strength, and a true fresh start.

**Lisa, can you tell us a little about yourself, what you do and what led you to this line of work?**

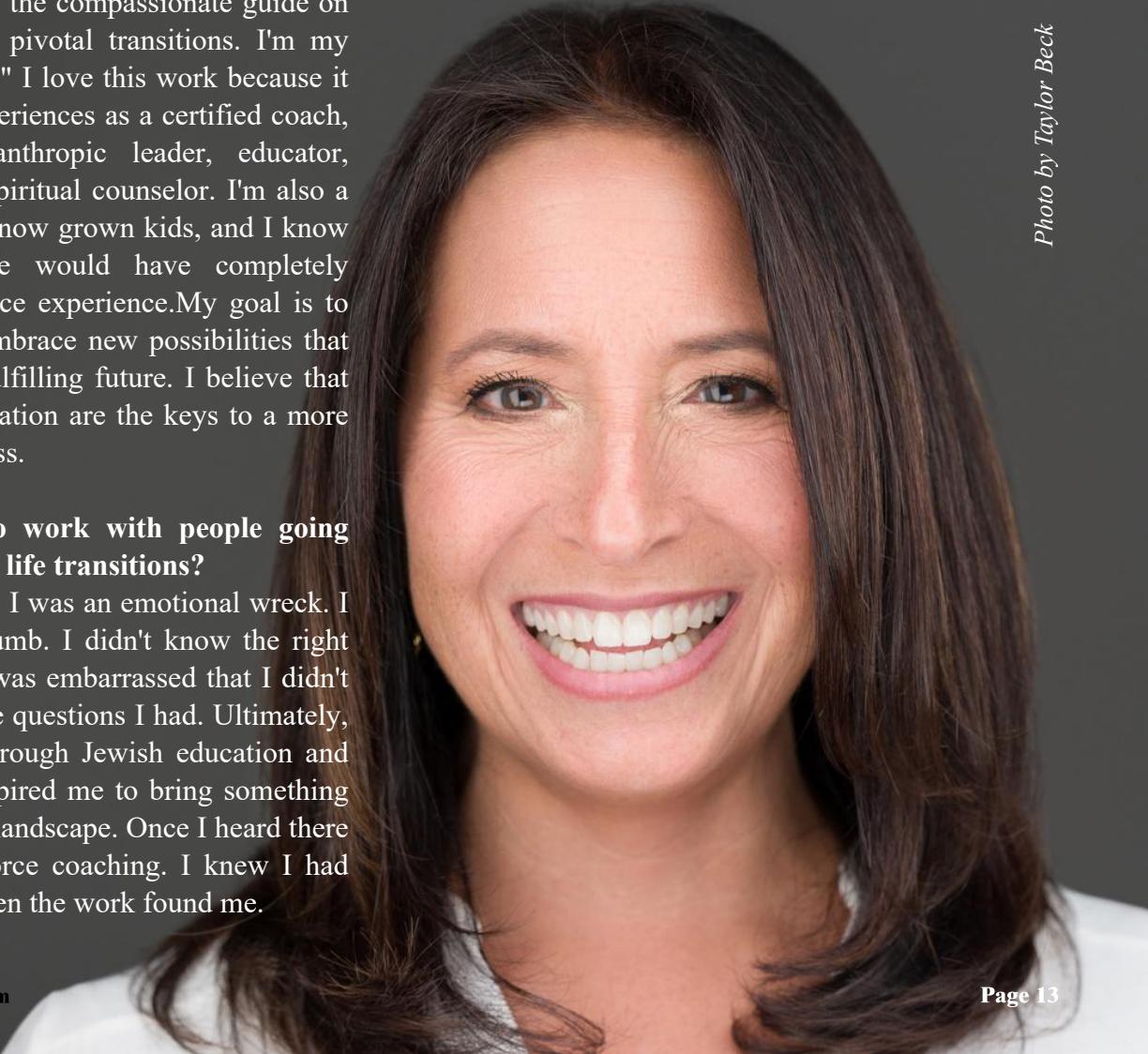
I'm Lisa Lisser, the founder of LZL Coaching, a boutique coaching firm specializing in divorce, mediation support, and the BeH2O™ co-parenting process. I see myself as the compassionate guide on the side through life's pivotal transitions. I'm my client's "phone a friend." I love this work because it blends my multiple experiences as a certified coach, former attorney, philanthropic leader, educator, author, mediator, and spiritual counselor. I'm also a divorced mom of three now grown kids, and I know the support I provide would have completely changed my own divorce experience. My goal is to inspire my clients to embrace new possibilities that shape their path to a fulfilling future. I believe that vision, values and education are the keys to a more grounded divorce process.

**What inspired you to work with people going through divorce or big life transitions?**

During my own divorce I was an emotional wreck. I felt guilty and I felt dumb. I didn't know the right questions to ask and I was embarrassed that I didn't know the answers to the questions I had. Ultimately, my learning journey through Jewish education and spiritual counseling inspired me to bring something different to the divorce landscape. Once I heard there was a field called divorce coaching. I knew I had found my work - and then the work found me.

**What is your specialty within the divorce space, and how do you typically support your clients?**

I have several areas of support. In the beginning, I work with people to help plan for their divorce, evaluate financial scenarios, learn their financial picture and begin to get educated about the divorce process. I help them find the authentic words to tell their spouse this is really happening. I also work with clients in the middle who are stuck in communication quagmires. We work on building tools and techniques to open up communication when necessary and close it down when boundaries have been crossed. I help clients prepare for mediation and understand that there are things they want, but things they want more. We prep what it means to negotiate from alignment. Finally, I work with individuals and couples through the BeH2O coparenting process to help them create a new operating system for their coparented family.



*Photo by Taylor Beck*

## **What makes your approach to working with clients unique?**

I think the vision, values and education foundation is essential to my work. Women feel like they get to know themselves when they pause and take the time to articulate what matters most to them. They start with their "Why", and that creates an avenue toward the future that is grounded and personal. Additionally, I help women learn that they can design their own future, and I let them build alignment through their values and life plan. Strategy comes from values and vision. Further, as one who practiced law and went through her own divorce, I know the pitfalls and I know what won't work. I help my clients find their words so that when they speak they are heard. Ultimately, I help them get "unstuck."

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**I help women learn that they can design their own future, and I let them build alignment through their values and life plan.**

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## **What's one thing that people are often surprised to learn about you?**

I think people are surprised that I have so many trainings and skills up my sleeve. I have lived a full life and have constantly pursued learning and education that enhanced my soul. I use my experience as a model for my clients. We can always learn more and build a network of support that is broader than what we might have imagined. Some of the people I work with in the divorce world have become good friends. We are aligned in values. When you find those people, you thrive.

## **Do you have a personal story or experience that helps you connect with clients on a deeper level?**

For some people, when I share my background in Jewish spirituality they are surprised. It's not all "woo woo", it is grounded in millenia of wisdom and history. What worked for people who lived generations before us, still works today. I think it is the acknowledgement that we are all humans. That we make mistakes and that's ok. We don't have to be perfect. I didn't have a perfect divorce. But it led me to where I am now. And this is where I am supposed to be. I hope people find that uplifting. I know my clients leave with confidence that they are standing for themselves.

## **What's your favorite way to reset after a long day?**

I love making dinner. Really. I work at home and I shift from work to home mode by planning my dinner. It really doesn't take that long or require too much advance planning to prepare a meal that is healthy and delicious. Sometimes it feels hard to do that when you live alone, but I have found that it makes me feel whole. Since my kids are grown and flown and I'm single, the simple caretaking act of preparing a meal is something I truly enjoy doing for myself.

## **If you could describe your work in three words, what would they be?**

Vision, Values and Alignment

## **What does "fresh start" mean to you personally?**

Fresh start means that every day is an opportunity to begin again. We are never done until we are done. Fresh start tells me that I have the opportunity to grow and learn and each day I can wake up and look at the world with wonder. Sometimes it can feel like the growing process is hard - that's true. And that's why they are called "growing pains." For me, my

Fresh Start is my opportunity to find the people who will walk with me toward my future.

Thank you Lisa for sharing your wisdom and experience with the Fresh Starts community! You can learn more about their work by checking out Lisa's profile!

Lisa Lisser

*Able to work with clients in all 50 states and Internationally*

**Lisa Lisser**



## ***3 Things I Learned from My Divorce with Writer Heather Sweeney***

When Heather Sweeney left her marriage, she wasn't just walking away from a relationship—she was reclaiming an identity that had been lost in the shadows of military life. In this powerful and honest episode, Heather joins Olivia Howell to share the story behind her memoir Camouflage, diving into the fear, uncertainty, and ultimate freedom that came with her divorce journey. From feeling stuck and scared as a stay-at-home mom, to rebuilding her life on her own terms, Heather's story is one of resilience, clarity, and becoming whole again.

Together, Heather and Olivia unpack what it means to start over when you don't even remember who you are anymore. They talk about the emotional toll of comparing divorces, the importance of self-trust and therapy, and why walking away from what's safe can sometimes be the bravest decision of all. Heather's experience navigating military divorce adds an important layer to the conversation, reminding listeners that every divorce is deeply personal and uniquely complex.

Whether you're currently in a relationship that's no longer serving you, navigating a divorce of your own, or finding your footing on the other side, this conversation will leave you feeling less alone—and a little more hopeful. Heather's wisdom is generous and grounding, and her message is clear: you are allowed to thrive after divorce. You are allowed to be whole.

A promotional image for the "divorce happens" podcast. It features a woman with blonde hair and glasses, smiling and resting her chin on her hand. The background is a green, leafy plant. The text "divorce happens podcast" is at the top, and "3 Things I Learned from My Divorce with Heather Sweeney" is at the bottom.

*Click through to listen!*

# *What to Do If You Receive a Draft Court Order You Don't Agree With*

It's not unusual during divorce for one party's lawyer to send over a draft order before it has been filed or signed by a judge. Sometimes those drafts include terms that don't quite match what was said in court—or that feel unfair. A common question we hear is: "What do I do if I disagree with parts of a draft order that's been sent to me?"

## **First Things First: A Draft Is Not Final**

If you've been sent an order to review, remember: it's not legally binding until a judge signs it. A lawyer can draft language, but that doesn't make it the law. You have the right to review, disagree, and respond.

## **How to Respond**

If you're representing yourself, here are some steps to consider:

- Read carefully. Go through the draft line by line and mark what you agree with and what you do not.
- Respond in writing. Send back a clear, professional response outlining what you agree with and where your disagreements are.
- Document everything. Save copies of emails, drafts, and notes for your records.
- Stay within deadlines. If you're asked to respond within a certain number of days, make sure to meet that deadline.

## **Protecting Your Interests**

If the draft order includes terms you believe are inaccurate or unfair—especially related to finances—you may need to file a written objection or your own proposed order with the court. Some people in this position file a counter-motion or affidavit to ensure their perspective is included. The exact form can vary depending on your state's court system, so it's best to check with your local court clerk or seek legal advice.

## **The Challenge of Going Pro Se**

Representing yourself in court ("pro se") can feel overwhelming, especially if the other side has an attorney. While you may not be able to hire a lawyer right away, you might be able to seek out limited-scope representation (sometimes called "unbundled legal services"), where an attorney helps you draft or review documents without taking on your whole case.

## **A Gentle Reminder**

You are not wrong for feeling overwhelmed. Divorce paperwork can be dense, confusing, and full of legal language that doesn't always match what was said in the courtroom. Remember: until a judge signs it, nothing is final. You are allowed to disagree, clarify, and protect your financial well-being.

At Fresh Starts, we have divorce attorneys, mediators, and financial experts in our Expert Guide who can support you—whether you need someone to look over a draft order, explain your options, or guide you through the next steps.

And if you're at the beginning of this process, download our free ebook, [What to Consider When You're Considering Divorce](#). It's full of scripts, checklists, and practical guidance to help you feel more confident when navigating paperwork, hearings, and unexpected challenges.

Your fresh start may be tangled up in legal documents right now, but step by step, you'll get clarity and support.

# How to Energetically Clear Your Home After Divorce



by Jo-Anne Suriel of the Energetic Well, Reiki Master,  
Akashic Records Reader and Sound Healer

[Learn more about The Energetic Well](#)

Your home is meant to be a sanctuary—a place you return to again and again to feel nurtured and to restore your energy.

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Following divorce, no matter if the uncoupling was amicable or contentious, it always helps to reset the atmosphere of your apartment or house. Actually, just about everyone can benefit from doing a space clearing like this periodically to invite in a sense of revitalization and vibrancy. You can do this practice after divorce or if you're simply ready for a fresh start.

We see the ancient wisdom of space clearing carried out on a wide scale throughout the Asian continent during Lunar New Year. Also, the practice of spring cleaning also goes back millennia in the Jewish tradition of Passover as well as the Persian new year, Nowruz. But no matter where you come from, your ancestors likely had some way of energetically cleansing the hearth. And you can do this, too, when moving into a different dwelling, preparing to welcome a new family member, honoring the changing of seasons, or before embarking on a brand-new chapter in life.

## This is For Everyone

I've been clearing space personally and for others for nearly 25 years. While I no longer offer space clearing professionally, I wanted to share how you can easily clear your home yourself. You don't need any special training or certifications to do this. In

fact, I believe it can be just as powerful to do this work on your own. You already know your home intimately and this practice is a beautiful way to develop your relationship with your abode—you got this!

## What if I Don't Currently Have a Home?

If you're a human being, then you must have somewhere to rest your head on occasion. Even if that space is a couch in your ex's apartment, consider that couch your home for this purpose. You can do this entire protocol no matter how small your space and no matter how temporary your situation.

## Disclaimers

This practice is meant for you to clear your own personal space. This is not meant to clear another individual's home, which involves more nuanced work that is beyond the scope of this article. For space that you feel is actually haunted, I recommend seeking the assistance of a Reiki Master who is trained in Holy Fire.

## How Will This Work?

In this process, you'll prepare your space and then do an energetic cleanse, which will cleanse, protect, and bless the energy of your home. This shifts the frequency within your space, which can ripple outward and extend a breath of fresh air into many other aspects of your life.

The protocol outlined below is based on indigenous knowledge, nature-based practices, feng shui, and divine guidance. Please be sure to read through the entire article before you get started.

## How and What to Prepare

As with many things in life, most of the heavy-lifting of space clearing is in the preparation. But stick with me—it will be so worth it! If you have a limited amount of time, figure out where you can break up the work below and perhaps do a little bit each day.

**TIME** - The time needed for this space clearing will depend on the size of your home and how much physical stuff is already in it. After completing the prep work, you could do the whole energetic cleanse in one morning or an afternoon. For a large house, you might need a full day. Ideally, you would do the preparation below in advance (taking as much time as you need for the prep) and then do the cleanse in a single day. However, if you need to break it up into pieces, I recommend completing the cleanse within a single week.

**MATERIALS:** All of these are suggestions. If you don't have access to certain materials, use the power of your mind's eye and visualize any components you'd like to utilize.

- Small altar cloth (or placemat, scarf, or any other small piece of fabric)
- Bell, chime, or singing bowl
- Journal (or paper) and pen
- Candle
- Small bowl of water
- Small bowl of salt
- Potted plant (or fresh flowers)
- Selenite crystal (or smudge, like a cinnamon stick or mugwort bundle)

**INTENTION:** What is your intention for this space clearing? Take five minutes or more to journal about what kind of energy you want in your space and in your life. Are you craving resilience? Do you want to call in abundance? Are you ready to let go of limiting beliefs? Do you simply want a fresh start?

Write down a word or short phrase to help guide the space clearing process. Do not skip this step! This is the energy that you'll be anchoring into your home. If you're not sure, you can always set an intention for health and happiness.

**THE PHYSICAL CLEARING:** Do this physical clearing in the days leading up to the energetic cleanse. If you're short on time, just do the best you can with the intention that you will continue to keep your space physically clear and tidy going forward. Remember that the physical supports the energetic. Grab a couple of large tote bags (or garbage bags)—designate one as “Donate,” for items in good condition that will be given to charity, and one as “Done,” for items to be thrown out.

Go through each room of your home and intentionally assess every object in the room. I recommend placing your hands on every object as taught by Marie Kondo in *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up*, and asking if the object sparks joy. Does the object create a feeling of warmth within your heart? Does it align with your intention?

Try to do this assessment quickly using your initial gut reaction rather than mental rationalizations. If you're in a rush, use your eyes to scan everything in the space and just pick up the items that you're not immediately sure about. Sort anything that doesn't resonate into the tote bags. This process is key in helping you to release any physical clutter.

For anything that belonged to your ex, unless it now feels like it truly belongs to you, it's best to toss. For items that you may want to save for your children, send those to storage or ask a trusted loved one to hold onto them until your child is ready to take ownership of the item.

The final preparation is to do a deep physical cleaning of your home. Do what you can to thoroughly cleanse and scrub every surface of your home. Most important are the floors and windows. If

possible, use non-toxic cleaning products or basic cleaners like water and vinegar. As you're cleaning, remember the intention you've set for your home.

### **The Energetic Cleanse**

Now that your home is physically clear and tidy, let's dive into the fun stuff!

First, focus—put your phone on Do Not Disturb and turn off any noisy electronics. Take a few minutes to sit in silence and be present with your home.

Next, open up all of the windows. If it's freezing out, at least crack one window in each room.

Start at the (approximate) center of your home and set up the altar cloth in a place that's accessible—the floor is ok as long as it will be safely undisturbed by animals, small children, etc. Place all of the other materials on the altar.

Pause, take a deep breath. Light the candle and speak your intention out loud. Hover your hands above the bowl of water with palms facing the water. Send the energy of love, along with your intention, from your palms into the water—it's ok, just go with it.

You're going to be walking through the rooms of your home with the various altar tools. Take your time with this energetic cleanse and hold a loving intention for your home in your heart as you go.

To begin, you'll cleanse your home by walking in a counterclockwise motion starting in the room where your altar is set up, then proceed to the next adjacent room and continue going room by room, spiraling outward in a counterclockwise direction until you've walked through each room. If you have multiple floors, begin on the first floor, then the basement, then do any upper floors (working from the second floor and continuing upward, if needed).

First, take your selenite, salt, and bell. Within each room, walk the selenite in a counterclockwise

motion sweeping it along each of the four walls (keeping the crystal a few inches away from the wall). At each corner, hover the selenite from the floor towards the ceiling and back down to clear any stuck energy.

Next, take another pass counterclockwise in the room and clap your hands in each corner going up and down a few times similar to the selenite clearing but instead with a vigorous applause. You may notice a shift in the sound of your claps as you go, changing from a duller sound to a sharper one.

After clapping out each corner, ring the bell three times from the center of the room, allowing the sound to reverberate until it stops on its own.

Finally, take the salt and, with gratitude, toss a pinch out of each window for protection.

Repeat the above steps in each room. Once completed, you can either close the windows or keep them open.

Return to your altar and take the bowl of water and plant to proceed with blessing your home.

For this part, you'll place the plant in the center of the room and then walk in a clockwise motion though your home and within each room. Dip your fingertips into the bowl of water and sprinkle the water all around each room as you walk. You could also use the head of a flower or plant leaves instead of your fingertips. As you do this, say your intention either out loud or in your mind. The presence of the plant will bless each room and infuse the space with a vibration of freshness. Repeat in each room.

Next, return to your altar. Express your gratitude for this cleansing, protection, and blessing either out loud or in your mind. Sprinkle any remaining salt around the exterior of your home for additional protection. Give any remaining water to the earth or to a houseplant. Write down in your journal any

intuitive messages you received during the cleansing.

For bonus points, you can complete the blessing by singing and dancing joyfully throughout your home. You could also play any music that makes you feel calm and relaxed to extend the blessing and invite in a spacious feeling of restoration. (If you're looking for a recommendation, check out my album, [The Remembering by The Energetic Well](#), a collection of frequency medicine songs designed to help you return to balance and harmony. Available on Bandcamp and on all music streaming platforms.)

Finally, back at the altar, seal the energetic cleansing, protection, and blessing, with your gratitude. Come into stillness, place your hands on your heart, and let the vibration of thanks radiate outward from your heart center—filling up every corner of your home with thankfulness. Blessed be.



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# 10 Things to Know When Divorcing an Addict



by **Meredith Beardmore of Mend with Mere**

[Learn more about Mend with Mere](#)

Divorcing someone with an addiction history is not just the end of a marriage. It is the unraveling of a system where one partner's needs, moods, and behaviors slowly became the organizing force of the relationship.

As a therapist, and as someone with lived experience, I see how often people feel unprepared for this kind of divorce. Not because they were naïve, but because the realities are rarely spoken about plainly. Addiction distorts relationships in specific ways, and those distortions do not disappear when a marriage ends.

This kind of divorce is different. It is layered. And it demands honesty, not only about what has already been lived, but about how those dynamics are likely to reappear during the legal, emotional, and parental unraveling that follows.

Here are ten things worth knowing before, and during, divorcing an addict.

**1 You were likely alone in the marriage long before divorce was on the table.** In many addiction-affected marriages, one partner slowly becomes the center of gravity. Their needs dictate the tone of the household. Their moods shape the day. Their behavior requires constant monitoring, adapting, or smoothing over. Often, the person using substances does not experience this as a problem, or does not see themselves as having one at all. By the time divorce becomes a consideration, the relationship has usually narrowed into something unrecognizable: less partnership, more management.

**2 People will expect you to keep sacrificing.** Because addiction is widely misunderstood, partners are often praised for endurance and questioned for leaving. There is an assumption that staying longer, trying harder, or being more patient might have changed the outcome. This expectation ignores how much has already been absorbed by the non-using partner, and how one-sided the relationship may have become long before the word divorce was spoken.

**3 The legal system often underestimates addiction-related risk.** Courts depend on documentation and timelines: proof of sobriety for a set period, compliance with court orders, or the absence of recent incidents. But addiction does not operate on clean timelines, and safety concerns do not disappear simply because a requirement has been technically met.

As a result, parents who ask for continued protections, such as alcohol testing before supervised visits, may be portrayed as unreasonable, reactive, or dramatic rather than cautious. For many, this is one of the most terrifying parts of the process: realizing that credible concerns about a child's safety may be dismissed, and that the parent raising them can be made to seem like the problem instead.

**5 You may be recast as the problem.** When one person stops compensating for dysfunction, the narrative often shifts. Boundaries get reframed as cruelty. Disengagement becomes abandonment. This reframing tends to occur when a system is no longer being held together, and someone must be blamed for its collapse.

**6 Sobriety does not automatically repair relational damage.** A partner may stop using substances and still remain emotionally unavailable, defensive, or unwilling to acknowledge harm. Recovery can change behavior without restoring trust, reciprocity, or shared responsibility. Those gaps matter, even when others believe improvement should be enough.

**7 From the outside, the divorce may look sudden.** From the inside, it is almost always years in the making. Friends and family often witness only the final decision, not the accumulation of broken agreements, emotional absence, or chronic instability that preceded it. Trying to make others understand rarely brings relief. At some point, it is worth letting go of the need to prove that you did enough.

**8 Children are affected by instability, not by the decision to leave.** Children are resilient. What disrupts them most is not change itself, but chronic unpredictability: emotional absence, broken routines, and homes organized around one person's volatility or unreliability. When a household becomes calmer, more predictable, and emotionally safer, children often adjust better than adults expect. Stability matters more than preserving the appearance of togetherness.

**9 Grief often arrives after separation, not before.** During the marriage, attention is often directed toward containment: finances, children, crisis management, and keeping things from getting worse. Survival takes precedence. Once the structure changes, what was postponed tends to surface. This grief can feel confusing, especially when leaving felt necessary, but it is not a sign that the decision was wrong.

**10 The physical toll often lingers.** Long-term exposure to instability frequently leaves partners with anxiety, hypervigilance, and exhaustion that persist well beyond separation. These are not personal shortcomings. They are patterned nervous system responses to prolonged stress.

**You do not need to make your decision legible to everyone.** Divorce invites commentary. Addiction invites opinion. Not all of it is informed, and not all of it deserves engagement. Some decisions are made quietly, over time, and do not benefit from public explanation.

Divorce in the context of addiction is rarely about a single breaking point. More often, it marks the end of a long period of imbalance, denial, and emotional disappearance.

Leaving does not simplify the story. It tells the truth about what the relationship required, and what it ultimately took.



# *What to Consider When You're Considering Divorce*

Thinking about divorce? This powerful, practical guide walks you through the first steps—emotionally, legally, and financially. With expert insights on custody, alimony, assets, and more, it's your essential roadmap to clarity, confidence, and support as you consider, plan, and prepare for divorce.

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## ***Get Your Fresh Starts Gear***

# 5 Tips From a Divorce Professional

with

LAURA LORBER, MEDIATOR

Divorce can feel overwhelming, but the right guidance can make all the difference. Laura Lorber, a Mediator, is sharing five powerful ways to make the divorce journey a little more manageable—and a lot less stressful.

**Laura, can you introduce yourself—your name, title, and the work you do?**

Hello, my name is Laura Lorber. I am a mediator, co-parenting coach, and author of "Your Co-Parenting Plan Blueprint." Using my background in early childhood education and my J.D., I help parents create stable, detailed parenting plans. My mission is to provide you with the tools to keep your children at the heart, and out of the middle, of the divorce process.

**What drew you to this profession, and why do you specialize in divorce? Why are you passionate about helping people navigate divorce?**

My passion is helping parents move from friction to partnership. While I often mediate divorces, I am equally drawn to helping couples who simply need to clarify their roles and responsibilities to save their family dynamic. I saw too many parents in my teaching years getting stuck in 'all-or-nothing' roles that led to resentment. I use my background in child development and law to help parents stop gate-

keeping and start strategizing. By focusing on temperament and clear communication, I help families restructure their relationships into something that actually works for everyone involved.

**What are your top five tips for someone going through divorce?**

## Tip 1: Your Children Already Know

Many couples stay together "for the kids," but children are experts at sensing tension. Research shows that chronic conflict or the "coldness" of a fractured home is often more damaging to a child's long-term development than the divorce process itself. Remember, 80% of divorces are resolved within three years; by choosing a path of peace now, you are protecting your children's emotional environment. Your goal isn't just to separate, but to move them out of the "middle" and back to the heart of a stable family.



## **Tip 2: Divorce While You Can Still Stand Each Other**

The smoothest, most affordable divorces happen when parents move forward before the relationship turns toxic. If you can still talk and think rationally, you retain control of the outcome. Even in the legal process, "filing together" removes the inherent nastiness of being served. Mediation is possible in high-conflict situations, but it is significantly faster and cheaper when there is still a baseline of trust and a shared desire to work together.

## **Tip 3: Create Your Post-Divorce Vision**

To stay in control during the process, you need a "Victory Vision." Just like an elite athlete, visualize what success feels like for you and your children after the dust settles. You aren't just leaving a marriage; you are building a better future. Keep this vision physically in front of you—on your mirror or dashboard—to help you remain the rational, clear-eyed champion your children need when tough decisions arise.

## **Tip 4: Choose Your Own Adventure: The Wealth-Preservation Path**

There isn't just one "right" way to divorce; there is only the path that fits your family's specific needs. Litigation is a vital tool, especially if you have highly complex assets, significant debt, or a situation where one party isn't being transparent. D.I.Y. can be a successful route for simple, no-asset cases where both parties are detail-oriented. The key is to remember that these aren't "all-or-nothing" choices. You can use mediation alongside an attorney to settle specific issues, or use it to finalize a D.I.Y. plan that needs a professional touch.

Regardless of the path you choose, keep your focus on wealth preservation. Every dollar spent on unnecessary legal battles is a dollar taken away from your children's future—their college funds, their extracurriculars, and their stability. Mediation is an incredible tool for efficiency because it allows you to focus your resources on the issues that actually

matter, like a co-parenting plan tailored to your children's developmental stages. By choosing a collaborative approach wherever possible, you stay in the driver's seat and ensure that your family's hard-earned assets go toward building your "fresh start" rather than funding a courtroom conflict.

## **Tip 5: Preparation, Preparation, Preparation: Work Smarter, Not Harder**

I like to say that divorce is a team sport, but that doesn't mean you need a massive payroll. It means being strategic about who you spend your money on. To divorce as economically as possible, you want to avoid paying high hourly professional rates for tasks you can do yourself. My best advice for the "missing middle"—those who need a professional result on a modest budget—is to treat your preparation like a part-time job.

The more work you do "at the kitchen table" before you ever meet with a professional, the more money you keep in your pocket. This is exactly why I created "Your Co-Parenting Plan Blueprint." I wanted to give parents a self-guided way to do the deep introspection and logistical planning that usually eats up hours of expensive mediation or legal time. By using a workbook or a coach to get your "ducks in a row," you ensure that when you are on the clock with a mediator, you are there only to finalize decisions, not to start from scratch. Using the right tools for the right tasks—whether it's a therapist for emotional processing or a workbook for plan drafting—allows you to protect your children's future without exhausting your bank account.

## **Out of all your tips, which one feels the most important right now, and why?**

I spent the most time on tips 4 and 5 because they represent the nuance required in family law. There is no single 'right' way to divorce, and I never want to be dismissive of the different tools—like litigation or DIY—that might be the best fit for a specific

family's needs. These two tips work in tandem: once you do the homework to understand your own landscape, you can proceed with a team that truly supports your vision. To me, the most important thing is that parents feel informed enough to choose a path that protects their children's future and their own peace of mind.

### What does “fresh start” mean to you in the context of divorce?

To me, a 'Fresh Start' isn't just about the day the papers are signed; it's the clarity that comes from looking honestly at what did and did not work for you and your children. It's about finding a way to grow through the divorce process rather than just surviving it. When you take the time to heal and learn from the past, you ensure that you move forward with a plan that fits your new life. A true fresh start is the peace of mind that comes when you are no longer stuck in a long, damaging conflict, but are finally ready to lead your family into a healthy, stable future.

*Thank you Laura for sharing your wisdom and experience with the Fresh Starts community! You can learn more about their work by checking out Laura's profile below!*



Photo by David Lorber

Laura Lorber, J.D. | Laura Lober  
*Able to work with clients nationally*

**Learn more about Laura Lorber, J.D.**



## ***How to Get Divorced as a Stay at Home Parent***

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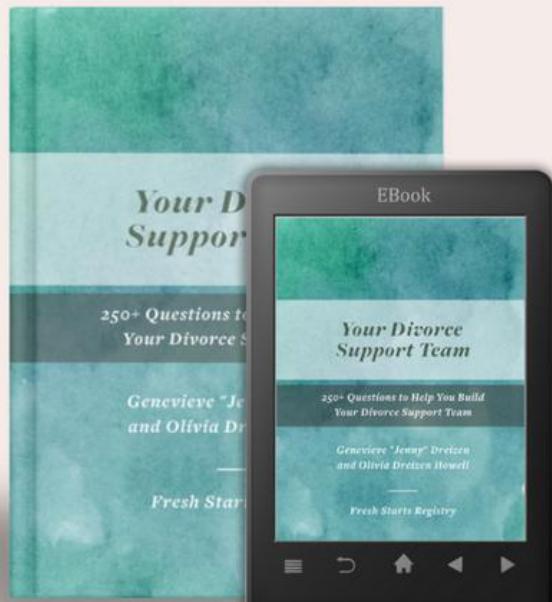
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# **What to Ask for in a Divorce When You Don't Know What to Ask For in the Divorce Settlement**

When your lawyer says, "Make a list of everything you want," it can feel overwhelming — especially when you're still reeling from the emotional upheaval of divorce. Where do you even start? Divorce isn't just about signing papers. It's about protecting your future, your children's stability, and your ability to rebuild your life.

This guide will walk you through exactly what you should ask for, why it matters, how to explain it, and how to advocate for yourself without missing anything crucial.

## **Custody & Parenting (If You Have Kids)**

### *Legal Custody (Decision-Making Authority)*

- What it is: The right to make major decisions for your child (medical care, education, religion).
- Why it's essential: Without legal custody, you could be excluded from important decisions about your child's life.
- How to explain it: "I want to ensure I have an equal say in our child's major life decisions."

### *Physical Custody (Where the Child Lives)*

- What it is: Determines the child's primary residence.
- Why it's essential: Daily routines and stability affect children's development and emotional well-being.
- How to explain it: "I want to ensure the children's living arrangements promote stability and consistency."

### *Parenting Time (Visitation Schedule)*

- What it is: A detailed schedule outlining each parent's time with the children.
- Why it's essential: Reduces future conflicts and provides clear expectations.
- How to explain it: "I would like a structured schedule that details holidays, school breaks, and regular visitation."

### *Right of First Refusal*

- What it is: If a parent is unavailable during their time, the other parent has the first opportunity to care for the child.
- Why it's essential: Protects your relationship with your child and minimizes third-party caregivers.
- How to explain it: "If the other parent cannot be with the children, I would like the first opportunity to care for them."

### *Communication Agreements*

- What it is: Establishes how parents communicate about the children (email, co-parenting apps).
- Why it's essential: Reduces miscommunication and emotional conflict.
- How to explain it: "I would like us to use a co-parenting communication app to keep everything organized and respectful."

### *Division of Extra Expenses*

- What it is: Sharing costs for extras like medical expenses, therapy, school supplies, and activities.
- Why it's essential: Covers expenses beyond basic support.
- How to explain it: "I would like us to divide extracurricular and medical expenses equally."

### *Health Insurance for the Children*

- What it is: Determines which parent maintains or provides insurance coverage.
- Why it's essential: Protects against unexpected healthcare costs.
- How to explain it: "I would like a clear agreement on who is responsible for providing and covering the children's health insurance."

### *College Contributions*

- What it is: Agreement on contributions towards children's future college expenses.
- Why it's essential: Planning now avoids future conflicts.
- How to explain it: "I would like us to agree on how we will contribute to college expenses."

## **Financial Matters (Including Non-Child Related)**

### *Division of Assets*

- What it is: Splitting all marital assets: homes, cars, bank accounts, investments.
- Why it's essential: Secures your financial foundation for the future.
- How to explain it: "I want an equitable division of all marital assets."

### *Division of Business Interests*

- What it is: Dividing any jointly owned business or business interest.
- Why it's essential: Businesses are valuable marital assets.
- How to explain it: "I want an equitable valuation and division of business interests."

### *Division of Debts*

- What it is: Allocating responsibility for mortgages, loans, and credit card debts.
- Why it's essential: Prevents you from being stuck with unfair debt.
- How to explain it: "I want a clear division of all marital debts."

### *Life Insurance*

- What it is: Requiring life insurance policies to secure support obligations.
- Why it's essential: Provides financial security for you and the children.
- How to explain it: "I would like life insurance policies maintained to secure future support payments."

### *Alimony/Spousal Support*

- What it is: Financial support paid to a spouse after divorce.
- Why it's essential: Helps financially stabilize after the divorce, especially if you sacrificed your career.
- How to explain it: "I would like to request fair spousal support based on our financial disparity."

### *Division of Cryptocurrency, Airline Miles, and Rewards*

- What it is: Splitting digital assets and rewards points.
- Why it's essential: These have real monetary value.
- How to explain it: "I would like to equitably divide all digital and reward-based assets."

### *Division of Retirement Benefits*

- What it is: Splitting retirement accounts like 401(k)s, pensions, and IRAs.
- Why it's essential: Ensures long-term financial security.
- How to explain it: "I would like a fair division of all retirement accounts."

### *Division of Personal Loans from Family/Friends*

- What it is: Handling responsibility for personal debts.
- Why it's essential: Prevents future disputes and resentment.
- How to explain it: "I want clarity on who is responsible for any personal or family loans."

## *Tax Filing Status and Dependency Exemptions*

- What it is: Deciding who claims the children for tax purposes.
- Why it's essential: Reduces tax burdens and ensures fairness.
- How to explain it: "I would like us to specify how tax filings and child exemptions are handled moving forward."

## **Housing & Living Situations**

### *Family Home and Other Properties*

- What it is: Determines who keeps or sells real estate.
- Why it's essential: Housing stability and financial security.
- How to explain it: "I would like a clear agreement on refinancing, buyouts, or sales."

### *Furniture, Appliances, and Personal Property*

- What it is: Dividing household contents.
- Why it's essential: Rebuilding requires resources.
- How to explain it: "I want an equitable division of home furnishings and appliances."

## **Personal Property & Sentimental Items**

### *Vehicles, Boats, RVs, etc.*

- What it is: Dividing major property.
- Why it's essential: Reliable transportation is crucial.
- How to explain it: "I want to fairly divide all vehicles and titled property."

### *Sentimental Items*

- What it is: Dividing keepsakes, heirlooms, and sentimental assets.
- Why it's essential: Emotional closure and fairness.
- How to explain it: "I would like to keep certain family heirlooms and sentimental items."

### *Pets*

- What it is: Deciding on pet custody and expenses.
- Why it's essential: Pets are family too.
- How to explain it: "I would like clear custody and cost-sharing agreements for our pets."

## **Legal Protections**

### *Non-Disparagement Clauses*

- What it is: Agreements to avoid badmouthing each other.
- Why it's essential: Protects children's emotional health.

### *Privacy Agreements*

- What it is: Agreements about sharing details online.
- Why it's essential: Maintains your dignity and reduces conflict.

### *Future Dispute Resolution Agreements*

- What it is: Requiring mediation before court action.
- Why it's essential: Saves time, money, and emotional stress.

## Long-Term Safeguards

### *Modification Clauses*

- What it is: Allowing for changes due to life circumstances.
- Why it's essential: Life is unpredictable.

### *Estate Planning Updates*

- What it is: Updating wills, trusts, and guardianship.
- Why it's essential: Protects your children's and your own future.

### *Post-Divorce Name Change*

- What it is: Returning to a former name or choosing a new one.

- Why it's essential: Personal closure and identity reclamation.

### *Health Insurance for Yourself*

- What it is: Securing post-divorce health coverage.
- Why it's essential: Healthcare costs can be crippling.

### *Social Security Benefits Division*

- What it is: Claiming spousal benefits if married 10+ years.
- Why it's essential: Supports your long-term retirement income.

## Commonly Forgotten Items to Ask For Checklist

<input type="checkbox"/> Right of First Refusal	<input type="checkbox"/> Holiday and Birthday Agreements
<input type="checkbox"/> Division of Airline Miles and Rewards	<input type="checkbox"/> Handling of Storage Units
<input type="checkbox"/> Pet Custody and Expenses	<input type="checkbox"/> Passport Control for Children
<input type="checkbox"/> College Contributions	<input type="checkbox"/> Extracurricular Costs
<input type="checkbox"/> Control of Family Coordination Apps	

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# *Here's How Working With a Parent Coordinator Can Help You*

*with*

JESSICA ZADJURA,  
FAMILY LAW ATTORNEY

If you've ever wondered what role a Parent Coordinator plays in the divorce process, you're not alone. Today, Jessica Zadjura's pulling back the curtain on how their expertise can support you every step of the way.

**Can you introduce yourself—your name, title, and the work you do?**

Jessica Zadjura is a Parent Coordinator who helps parents reduce conflict, strengthen communication, and navigate day-to-day co-parenting challenges with a steady, child-focused approach. She provides structure, clarity, and practical strategies that keep families out of constant crisis and away from the courtroom. Her work supports parents in building healthier patterns, managing expectations, and making decisions that prioritize their children's long term well-being.

**What drew you to this profession, and why do you specialize in divorce?**

I was drawn to this work because I saw how much stability and clarity families need during some of the most overwhelming moments of their lives. Divorce and custody matters are where clear communication, steady problem solving, and child-centered structure



*Photo by Erin Aud*

can make the biggest difference. I choose this area because helping families find a healthier path forward is meaningful, necessary, and deeply rewarding.

### **What exactly does a Parent Coordinator do during the divorce process?**

A Parent Coordinator steps in to manage the day-to-day conflict that courts and attorneys are not built to handle. During the divorce process, I help parents communicate more effectively, clarify expectations, and create workable routines so their children are not caught in the crossfire. After the divorce is finalized, I assist with implementing the parenting plan, resolving minor disputes before they escalate, and keeping parents focused on consistent, child-centered decision making.

### **What are the biggest misconceptions people have about your role?**

The biggest misconception is that a Parent Coordinator “takes sides” or makes major legal decisions for the parents. Another common misunderstanding is that the role is only for “high-conflict” families, when in reality it is often most effective for parents who simply need structure, communication support, and consistent follow through. Many people also assume that involving a Parent Coordinator means more drama or cost, when the truth is that it usually prevents repeat crises, repeated motions, and unnecessary returns to court.

### **At what stage in divorce should someone consider working with a Parent Coordinator?**

Parties should consider working with a Parent Coordinator as soon as communication starts breaking down and routine decisions turn into repeated arguments. It is especially helpful once a custody schedule is being discussed, when day-to-day parenting questions start piling up, or when parents find themselves going back to their attorneys for issues that do not truly require court intervention. Many families also bring in a Parent Coordinator after an order is entered to ensure smooth implementation and prevent small problems from becoming full-blown conflicts.

### **What are the top ways you help clients during divorce?**

I support parents by bringing structure, clarity, and steadiness to situations that often feel chaotic. I help them communicate in a productive, forward-focused manner, interpret and implement the parenting plan, and resolve day-to-day conflicts before they grow into formal disputes. I guide parents through practical problem solving when they reach an impasse and keep the decision making centered on their children’s needs. I also ensure that expectations, responsibilities, and routines are clearly understood so both households can operate with consistency. In doing so, I reduce unnecessary attorney involvement and limit the likelihood of repeated returns to court.

### **How does working with you make the process less overwhelming or stressful?**

Working with a Parent Coordinator reduces stress by giving parents a clear, reliable structure for communicating and resolving disagreements. Instead of reacting in the moment or getting stuck in the same arguments, parents gain a steady, neutral professional who helps separate emotion from decision making. I break issues into manageable steps, offer practical solutions, and keep conversations focused on what actually matters for the children. This consistency prevents crises, minimizes attorney involvement, and keeps families out of court. In short, parents feel less overwhelmed because they no longer have to navigate every conflict alone.

### **What outcomes do your clients usually experience after working with you?**

Many families experience clearer communication, fewer day-to-day disputes, and more predictable routines for their children. Parents often report feeling more confident in managing co-parenting decisions and less reactive in high-stress moments. Some families reach lasting, practical agreements that keep them out of court, while others still need periodic legal intervention but with far fewer emergencies or escalated conflicts. Overall, most parents gain stability, structure, and a far more manageable co-parenting dynamic than they had before.

## **What's one example of how your work has made a big difference in someone's divorce journey?**

Parent coordination makes a meaningful difference because it gives parents a steady, structured way to manage conflict that the court system simply cannot provide. Instead of reacting in the moment or cycling through the same arguments, parents work with a neutral professional who helps them communicate more effectively, clarify expectations, and problem-solve in real time. The process keeps decisions focused on the children, breaks issues into manageable steps, and reduces the emotional intensity that often derails progress. Even in cases where conflict remains high or litigation is still necessary, parent coordination limits the number of crises, reduces misunderstandings, and creates more predictable routines for both households. In short, it helps families move forward with more stability, less chaos, and a clearer path through difficult transitions.

## **What's one piece of advice you'd give someone thinking about hiring a Parent Coordinator?**

The most important advice is to approach the process with openness and a genuine willingness to try new ways of communicating. A Parent Coordinator cannot change the past or force agreement, but the work becomes far more effective when parents are willing to shift habits, focus on the children, and engage with the structure provided. The more both parents lean into the process, the more stability and relief they will experience.

## **How do you collaborate with other divorce professionals to support clients?**

A Parent Coordinator collaborates with other professionals by serving as the steady point of communication that helps keep everyone aligned and informed. I work with attorneys to clarify the scope of the parenting plan, identify issues that need legal interpretation, and ensure parents follow court

orders. I coordinate with therapists, counselors, and divorce coaches when emotional or behavioral issues affect co-parenting dynamics, making sure each professional stays within their role while supporting the family's progress. This teamwork keeps the process efficient, reduces mixed messages, and ensures the parents receive consistent, child-focused support.

*Thank you Jessica for sharing your wisdom and experience with the Fresh Starts community! You can learn more about their work by checking out Jessica's profile below!*



**Jessica Zadjura | Family Law Attorney**  
*Able to work with clients in Maryland*

**Learn more about Zadjura Family Law LLC**

# 10 Questions About Child Custody to Ask Your Divorce Lawyer

Divorce is a deeply personal and emotionally charged process, especially when children are involved. As parents, ensuring the well-being and best interests of your children is paramount, making it crucial to have a clear understanding of child custody matters during a divorce. Your divorce lawyer becomes a critical ally in navigating this complex terrain, advocating for your rights and guiding you through the legal aspects of child custody. We rounded up 10 important questions about custody to ask your divorce lawyer, and explore the significance of asking these questions, as well as the reasons why doing so is essential in safeguarding your children's future and ensuring a fair and amicable parenting arrangement. By gaining clarity and arming yourself with knowledge, you can approach child custody negotiations with confidence and make informed decisions that prioritize your children's happiness and well-being.

## 1. What are the different types of child custody arrangements, and what factors are considered in determining custody?

Understanding the types of custody, such as physical custody, legal custody, and joint custody, helps you grasp the available options and the factors that courts consider when making custody decisions. Here are 10 general questions to ask your divorce lawyer about child custody.

## 2. What are the criteria for determining the best interests of the child?

Inquiring about the factors that courts consider in determining the best interests of the child helps you understand what aspects of your situation may influence custody decisions and how to present your case effectively.

## 3. How is parenting time or visitation typically structured?

Understanding how parenting time or visitation schedules are usually established helps you anticipate the potential arrangement and develop a parenting plan that works for both you and your child.

## 4. What are the potential implications of relocation or moving with a child after divorce?

If you anticipate needing to relocate after the divorce, understanding the legal implications, requirements, and potential impact on custody arrangements is crucial for making informed decisions.

## 5. How can I demonstrate my ability to provide a stable and nurturing environment for my child?

Asking this question allows you to gather insights on how to present evidence and showcase your ability to provide a stable and supportive home environment, which can positively influence custody decisions.

## 6. What are some common issues or disputes that arise regarding child custody, and how can they be resolved?

Learning about common challenges related to child custody and potential resolution methods helps you prepare for possible conflicts and explore effective solutions.

## 7. How is child support determined, and what expenses does it cover?

Inquiring about child support helps you understand the financial obligations associated with caring for your child and ensures you have a clear understanding of the factors considered in calculating child support payments.

## 8. How can co-parenting challenges be addressed and managed effectively?

Understanding strategies for effective co-parenting and addressing potential challenges helps promote a positive co-parenting relationship, which is beneficial for your child's well-being.

9. **Can custody arrangements be modified or adjusted in the future?** Inquiring about the possibility of modifying custody arrangements in the future is important as circumstances may change over time. Understanding the process for seeking modifications provides clarity for the long term.
10. **What resources or professionals can assist with child custody evaluations or assessments if needed?** In some cases, child custody evaluations may be necessary. Asking about resources and professionals who can assist with evaluations helps you understand the potential steps involved and the professionals' qualifications.

Asking these questions provides valuable information about child custody laws, considerations, and strategies, allowing you to be better prepared and make informed decisions throughout the divorce process. Remember that specific laws and practices may vary by jurisdiction, so consulting with your divorce lawyer is essential for personalized advice.

[Download the Workbook Page](#)

## Jenny Says So

### The Divorce Announcement Dilemma

Dear Jenny,

I feel ridiculous even writing this, but I'm genuinely stuck. I know I should probably tell people about my divorce before they hear it somewhere else or start filling in the blanks, but the idea of making a "divorce announcement" makes my whole body cringe.

Part of me worries people will judge me. Part of me worries they'll pity me. And part of me is scared I'll say it "wrong" and turn it into a bigger thing than I want it to be. I don't want a million follow-up questions. I don't want to explain the whole story. I just want to share what's true and move forward without feeling like I'm standing in the middle of a room asking everyone to look at me.

Is there a way to tell people that feels... normal? Private? Not like I'm writing a press release for my own heartbreak?

Love,  
Embarrassed in East Hampton

[Read Jenny's response →](#)

Dear Embarrassed in East Hampton,

You don't have to do the press release version. You really don't. And you're not "being weird" for cringing—this is one of those uniquely modern social dilemmas where your personal life becomes public information unless you shape the story first.

Here's the permission slip: you don't owe a public divorce announcement. You can share selectively, slowly, and in the format that feels safest—one-on-one texts, a small group message, an email to close family, or even "I'm telling you now because I care about you" voice notes. The goal isn't to satisfy curiosity. The goal is to reduce the emotional labor of repeating yourself and to set a boundary around what happens next.

When you're ready, use our VASE Method of Communication: Validate, Acknowledge, Support, Express. It's clear, human, and it keeps you from over-explaining.

**Validate:** Name what's happening.

**Acknowledge:** Set the tone you want.

**Support:** Mention the care you've received.

**Express:** Close with gratitude (and a soft boundary if needed).

**Copy/paste script:**

*"Quick life update: [Name] and I have decided to end our marriage. We're proud of the life we built and we're focusing on moving forward in the healthiest way for us and our family. We've felt really held by the love and support around us, and we're grateful. Thank you for being part of our lives as we transition."*

*If you want a boundary line, add:*

*"I'm not ready to share details, but I appreciate your care."*

You're not embarrassing. You're just in a tender chapter. And you get to decide who gets the bookmark.

Here for you, always –  
Jenny

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# 10 Essential Questions to Ask a Potential Co-Parenting Coach for Your Divorce

## *The Ultimate Guide to Interviewing a Co-Parenting Coach*

Navigating co-parenting during or after a divorce can be incredibly challenging. A co-parenting coach helps bridge the communication gap, mediate conflicts, and provide strategies to create a healthy environment for your children. Finding the right co-parenting coach means asking the right questions to understand their approach, expertise, and compatibility with your family's needs. Here are 10 essential questions to ask a potential co-parenting coach to ensure they are the right fit for your family dynamics.

### **1. What is Your Experience with Co-Parenting and High-Conflict Situations?**

Co-parenting is already complex, but if your divorce is high-conflict, you need someone experienced in managing tension and mediating disputes. An experienced coach will have proven strategies to handle stubborn disagreements and help create a peaceful environment for your children.

Follow-Up Questions:

- How many families have you worked with?
- Do you specialize in high-conflict co-parenting?
- Have you worked with families with special needs children or complex custody arrangements?

### **2. What is Your Coaching Philosophy and Approach?**

Different coaches have different philosophies. Some are solution-focused, while others are more emotionally driven. It's important to understand whether their approach matches your communication style and family needs.

Follow-Up Questions:

- Are your methods more directive or collaborative?
- Do you use structured plans or is it more fluid based on needs?
- How do you handle situations where one parent is uncooperative?
- 

### **3. How Do You Support Effective Communication Between Co-Parents?**

One of the biggest challenges in co-parenting is communication. A good coach provides tools and strategies for clear, conflict-free discussions about your children.

Follow-Up Questions:

- Do you use communication apps or structured meeting agendas?
- How do you handle misunderstandings or disagreements?
- What strategies do you teach for non-confrontational communication?

### **4. Do You Provide Guidance on Parenting Plans and Custody Arrangements?**

A well-structured parenting plan is the backbone of successful co-parenting. Your coach should be able to help you design a schedule that is fair, realistic, and child-focused.

Follow-Up Questions:

- Do you help create customized parenting plans?
- Can you assist with modifications if circumstances change?
- Are you familiar with state custody laws?

### **5. How Do You Handle Co-Parenting Conflicts?**

Conflict is often unavoidable, but how it's managed makes all the difference. A co-parenting coach should have proven methods to de-escalate tension and keep discussions focused on solutions.

Follow-Up Questions:

- What are your go-to conflict resolution strategies?

- How do you mediate when one parent is uncooperative?
- Do you involve children in conflict resolution?

## 6. Do You Work with Blended Families or Extended Family Dynamics?

If you or your ex-spouse have remarried or have new partners, the dynamics of co-parenting change. A coach experienced with blended families can help you navigate boundaries, roles, and expectations.

Follow-Up Questions:

- Do you provide guidance for step-parent relationships?
- How do you manage grandparent involvement or other extended family members?
- What strategies do you recommend for integrating new partners?

## 7. How Do You Measure Progress in Co-Parenting?

Tracking progress is crucial to understand if the coaching is effective. Your coach should have clear methods for evaluating improvements in communication, conflict resolution, and overall harmony.

Follow-Up Questions:

- Do you set measurable goals during sessions?
- How do you track improvements in communication and conflict management?
- Do you adjust your approach based on progress?

## 8. Are Sessions In-Person, Virtual, or Both?

Flexibility in meeting formats can make co-parenting coaching more accessible and consistent, especially if parents live far apart or have demanding schedules.

Follow-Up Questions:

- Do you offer virtual sessions?
- Are there options for evening or weekend appointments?
- Can both parents join remotely if needed?

## 9. What Are Your Fees, and How Are They Structured?

Understanding costs upfront helps prevent surprises. Some coaches charge hourly rates, while others offer packages. Make sure their rates fit within your budget and expectations.

Follow-Up Questions:

- Do you charge per session or offer packages?
- Are there additional costs for written parenting plans or follow-up support?
- What is your cancellation policy?

## 10. Can You Provide References or Testimonials?

Testimonials and references provide insight into a coach's effectiveness and communication style. Hearing from past clients can help you gauge if they're the right fit for your family.

Follow-Up Questions:

- Can you share testimonials from past clients?
- Are you willing to provide references?
- Do you have success stories of high-conflict co-parenting situations?

### It's important to remember that...

Finding the right co-parenting coach is a crucial step in ensuring stability and harmony for your children post-divorce. By asking these ten essential questions, you gain clarity on the coach's experience, style, and methods for managing conflict and improving communication. A skilled co-parenting coach can turn a difficult situation into a more peaceful, child-focused partnership that benefits everyone involved.

[Browse Co-Parenting Specialists](#)

# *I'm Divorced and a Divorce Professional—Here's What I Learned*

*with*

MEG PRIEST, DIVORCE COACH

At Fresh Starts, we're proud to spotlight the incredible professionals who guide people through one of life's most challenging transitions: divorce. Today, we're featuring Meg Priest, a Divorce Coach, whose work helps clients find clarity, strength, and a true fresh start.



*Photo by Caitlin DiBlasi*

**Meg, what was your divorce journey like—what season of life you were in, the biggest challenge, and what supported you most?**

People will share birth stories with strangers, but ask about their divorce and suddenly everyone goes quiet. It shouldn't be that way.

My own story still feels surreal. We'd been married 13 years, raising four great kids, laughing, talking, grateful. We weren't perfect, but we were steady. Or so I thought.

I was 50 when everything cracked open. My ex told me he "had to sleep with someone else to know if he still wanted to be married to me." No discussion, just a declaration. He left the kids with me and said he planned to drain our 401K to fix up our rental so he'd have a place to live.

In that moment, I knew two things:

If he followed through, our marriage couldn't survive, and—

If I didn't protect my kids and our future, no one would.

So I filed. Not out of anger, but out of self-respect and necessity. Later I learned he didn't actually want a divorce—he wanted to "test" our marriage. But the trust was already broken. If I stayed, I wouldn't have recognized myself. And what lesson would that teach my kids about love and boundaries?

Everyone was shocked. I was shocked. But I never felt shame. I felt aligned with myself.

There are so many hard parts to divorce. But the hardest for me, without question, was losing time with my kids. Realizing that holidays, tuck-ins, thunderstorm snuggles—all of it was suddenly cut in half. It felt like something sacred had been stolen.

In the early dark days, what helped me most was knowing my worth. Knowing my kids were watching and that someday they'd understand I did something hard and did it with integrity. And my friends—they let me say the same things a hundred times until the pain had somewhere to go. I didn't get pity; I got respect. That mattered.

I wish I'd had the tools I needed to guide me through the process. They didn't exist. I needed to understand the steps, the timeline, the strategy. If I had known what I know now, I would have saved tens of thousands of dollars and a mountain of panic.

That gap—between what women need and what exists—is what led me here. I didn't need a lawyer for most of it.

I needed a Divorce Organizer. I didn't have one, so I became one.

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### ***In that moment, I knew...If I didn't protect my kids and our future, no one would.***

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**What's one thing your own divorce taught you that you couldn't have learned otherwise? Looking back, what would you do differently in your divorce? What surprised you most about the divorce process?**

My divorce taught me something I don't think you can learn any other way: when life cracks open, your real self steps forward. I learned that my values aren't theoretical — they're lived. When my marriage ended, I didn't crumble the way I always feared I might. I actually became more me. I learned that self-respect is a compass you can trust, even when everything else feels like a storm. And I learned that my kids watch how I move through hard things more than they listen to anything I say. That stayed with me.

Looking back, the one thing I'd do differently is get informed sooner. I walked into the legal process blind — like most people do — and I paid for it. Literally. I spent tens of thousands of dollars on administrative work that had nothing to do with legal strategy. If I had understood the actual lifecycle of divorce, what mattered and what didn't, I would have handled things very differently. I would have been calmer, clearer, more organized, and less reactive. I also would have trusted myself sooner instead of waiting for permission from professionals who didn't know my life nearly as well as I did.

What surprised me most about divorce was how little of it is about the law, and how much of it is about logistics, paperwork, timing, and emotional stamina. I thought divorce would feel like a dramatic courtroom moment. Instead, it felt like managing a huge, messy project while grieving a life I didn't want to lose. And I was shocked by how few tools existed to help people navigate it. No roadmap, no checklist, no "here's what comes next." You're just thrown into the deep end and expected to swim.

That gap — the total lack of structure and guidance — is what ultimately pushed me into the work I do now. I became the resource I desperately needed back then.

**How does your personal divorce experience shape the way you work with clients now? Do you feel your divorce gave you a different kind of empathy for clients? How so?**

My divorce shapes everything about how I work with clients. I don't come at this from theory — I come at it from the trenches. I know what it's like to be blindsided, have the life you built suddenly rearranged, make decisions while your heart is in your throat. I lived it, I anticipate my clients' needs before they need it.

It also changed how I support people. I'm not here to rush or overwhelm them with legal jargon. I'm here to slow everything down. Divorce feels chaotic, but

it doesn't have to be frantic. I learned that the hard way. My clients don't have to. I provide structure, context, and the guidance that I never had. I show where the money leaks happen, where panic spikes, where people overspend because they don't know the rules. I'm basically handing them the roadmap I wish someone had handed me.

As for empathy — mine is grounded and practical. I understand the grief, fear, and loneliness of having your life split apart while you're still expected to function. But I also know that clarity returns, confidence rebuilds, and this process won't break you if you get the right support early.

### **What's one piece of advice you'd give someone going through divorce right now?**

If I could give one piece of advice to someone going through divorce right now, it would be this: slow down. Divorce feels like an emergency, but it's not. You don't have to make every decision today. You don't have to solve the whole future this week. You have more time than your panic wants you to believe.

When you slow down, you think better. You protect your money, your energy, and your sanity. You make choices from clarity instead of fear. And you give yourself room to figure out what you want — not what your ex wants, not what your lawyer pushes, not what your anxiety is screaming.

I wish someone had told me that. I would've saved tens of thousands of dollars, a lot of sleepless nights, and so much unnecessary heartbreak. So that's my advice: pause. Breathe. Gather information. Understand the process. And take it one small, steady step at a time.

You're not behind. You're not failing. You're just rebuilding — and rebuilding takes time.

### **How do you encourage clients to see divorce not just as an ending, but as a fresh start?**

I never try to force anyone to see divorce as a "fresh start" when they're still in the middle of heartbreak. That's not how real life works. Instead I help them get organized, informed, and steady, because clarity creates hope. When the chaos quiets, people can finally see what's possible on the other side.

I remind clients that divorce is an ending. And endings hurt. But it's also the dismantling of a life that wasn't working. Once the dust settles, there's room for something better. I help them reconnect to themselves: their values, instincts, and vision for their future. When they feel more like themselves, the idea of a fresh start doesn't feel like a slogan — it feels real.

And honestly, I'm proof. I didn't want my marriage to end, but rebuilding forced me to step into a life that fits me better. My clients don't need blind positivity; they need someone who's been through it and can say, "You're not lost — you're transitioning. And this transition can lead somewhere good." I show them structure, information, and self-trust. And somewhere along the way, they start to feel the fresh start for themselves.

### **What's one misconception you had about divorce before experiencing it yourself?**

Before I went through it myself, I thought divorce was mostly a legal event — something that happened in courtrooms with dramatic conversations and big, decisive moments. I assumed it would be about "the law" more than anything else.

That was wildly wrong.

What I learned is that divorce is mostly an administrative process wrapped around an emotional

earthquake. It's paperwork, deadlines, forms you've never heard of, financial statements you're suddenly expected to understand, and a system that assumes you already know the rules when you absolutely do not. The legal part is tiny. The logistical part is enormous.

I also believed there would be guidance — that someone would walk me through what happens when, what's important, what's noise. Instead, it felt like being dropped into the middle of a maze without a map.

That misconception is exactly why I do the work I do now. Because once you know how the system actually works, it becomes a lot less terrifying — and a lot less expensive.

### **What's one thing that people are often surprised to learn about you?**

People are often surprised to learn that I didn't always feel as strong as I may come across now. I didn't walk into my divorce with a master plan or unshakable confidence. I was just a mom trying to protect her kids and her integrity while my life was falling apart in real time.

What surprises people is that I wasn't born "resilient." I built that muscle on the fly — while Googling legal terms I'd never heard of, while trying not to fall apart in front of my kids, while figuring out how to navigate a system that gives you zero instruction.

And maybe the other thing that surprises people is that I'm genuinely an optimist. I'm practical and organized, yes, but underneath that I really do believe people can rebuild a life that fits them better. I'm living proof of it.

So the thing people don't always expect is that my strength wasn't a starting point — it was something I had to earn, one hard decision at a time.

So the thing people don't always expect is that my strength wasn't a starting point — it was something I had to earn, one hard decision at a time.

### **What does life look like for you now, after divorce?**

It's hard to describe exactly what life looks like now — but it looks possible. That's the word that keeps coming to me. I can see so many more paths than I ever could before. I try new things. I travel to places that never fit into my old life. I make my own traditions instead of inheriting ones that never felt right.

There's no fear anymore. Not of starting over, not of failing, not of choosing the life I want. Failure isn't a threat to me now, it's just part of the process of getting somewhere better.

And my home... that's been the biggest shift. There's a peace in my house that didn't exist before. I'm not sure what created it — maybe it's the decluttering, maybe it's the care I've put into it, or the way the garden blooms all summer — but people feel it the moment they walk in. My kids feel it. I feel it.

There's this collective exhale when you step through the door. A sense of calm and safety, like the chaos stays outside. It's the life I have now, and it fits.

### **What does "fresh start" mean to you personally?**

A "fresh start" to me isn't about wiping the slate clean or pretending nothing happened. It's quieter than that. It's the moment you realize you get to choose what your life looks like now — not out of crisis, not out of obligation, but out of clarity.

For me, a fresh start meant stepping out of a life that no longer fit and into one where I could finally hear myself again. It meant creating a home that feels peaceful, choosing traditions that feel authentic, and

building a future that's aligned with who I am now, not who I was trying to be in my marriage.

It also means possibility. The freedom to try, to fail, to change your mind, to grow in directions you couldn't have imagined before. A fresh start isn't loud or dramatic. It's the steady return to yourself—and the realization that you're allowed to build a life that feels good all the way through.

*Thank you Meg for sharing your wisdom and experience with the Fresh Starts community! You can learn more about their work by checking out Meg's profile below!*

Plan For Divorce | Meg Priest  
*Able to work with clients globally*

**Plan For Divorce**



*Photo by Deb Grant*

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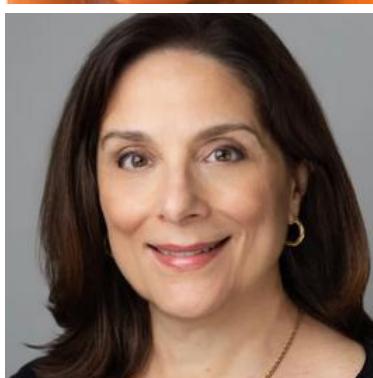
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# Divorce 101 A–Z: *F Is for Financial Disclosure (and February)*



**February has a reputation for being about love—roses, chocolates, grand gestures. But in the world of divorce, February often marks something quieter and far more practical: clarity.**

That's why this month, in our Divorce 101 A to Z series, F is for Financial Disclosure.

Financial disclosure is the process of openly sharing all financial information during a divorce. Bank accounts. Credit cards. Retirement funds. Debts. Income. Assets. The unglamorous, spreadsheet-heavy reality of how a household actually functioned. And while it may not feel romantic, financial disclosure is one of the most loving acts you can offer yourself during a divorce.

Here's the truth: divorce decisions are only as fair as the information they're based on. Without full disclosure, negotiations stall, mistrust grows, and people are left making life-altering decisions in the dark. Financial disclosure isn't about "catching" someone—it's about creating a shared set of facts so that resolution can actually happen.

February is a fitting backdrop for this conversation because it's a transitional month. We're no longer at the beginning of the year, but we're not fully settled into it either. That mirrors where many people are

emotionally when divorce becomes real: no longer pretending everything is fine, but not yet sure what comes next. Financial disclosure sits right in that in-between space. It's uncomfortable—but it's clarifying.

If you're navigating divorce right now, think of financial disclosure as a form of self-respect. Gathering documents, asking questions, and understanding your financial landscape doesn't make you difficult—it makes you informed. And information is power, especially when you're rebuilding.

So this February, instead of focusing on what's been lost, consider what can be revealed. Because when finances are transparent, the path forward—while still hard—becomes clearer. And clarity, in divorce, is its own kind of love.



**Listen to Divorce 101!**

## SURVIVAL SCENARIOS

# **“I’m Being Asked to Sign Papers I Don’t Understand”**

*Survival Scenarios are all about the real-life “oh no, now what!?” moments people face during divorce—like empty bank accounts, custody curveballs, or surprise legal papers—and pairing them with clear, compassionate guidance from trusted experts. Each post in the series offers support, strategies, and a reminder that you don’t have to face these challenges alone.*

*Help! I’m staring at these divorce papers and I feel sick. My spouse just handed me a stack of documents and said, ‘Just sign—it’s standard.’ But I don’t understand half of what’s in here. Am I about to sign away my rights? What if I mess up something about custody, money, or the house? I don’t want to look difficult, but I also don’t want to make a mistake I can’t undo.*



**Guidance from Allison McFadden, Mediator and Divorce Coach,  
founder of Divorce by Allison**

[Learn more about Divorce by Allison](#)

\*this is not legal advice, please reach out to one of our trusted divorce lawyers for further assistance.

**What should I never sign without legal review?** If you don't understand it, don't sign it. Divorce papers aren't a software update you can scroll through and hit accept without reading. Never sign settlement agreements, parenting plans, or anything containing a waiver of rights (spousal support, retirement, property, etc.) without understanding the legal implications.

These documents can have life-changing and often permanent consequences—you could be giving up things you're entitled to without even realizing it. Look for red-flag words like “permanent,” “binding,” “irrevocable,” “waiver,” “terminate,” or “freely and voluntarily consenting.”

**Who should I take these documents to before signing?** A family law attorney. If funds are limited, start with free legal aid resources or consider a limited-scope consultation where an attorney reviews the documents and advises you on your specific situation.

If you're worried that working with an attorney will ramp up the conflict, seek out an amicable or collaborative attorney. You want someone who can explain what the documents mean, how the law applies to you, and advise you based on what your goals are—not someone who is going to add fuel to the fire.

**What risks could I face if I sign under pressure?**

Pressure is a manipulation tactic. There's virtually no scenario where something is so time-sensitive that you can't have it reviewed before signing. If someone is rushing you to sign without legal review, that's your biggest red flag.

Unfortunately, while your spouse may have been the person you trusted before, you can't necessarily trust them to have your best interest at heart now. It is difficult to get an agreement thrown out later, even if you felt pressured. That means you could inadvertently give up years of retirement savings or much-needed spousal support just because of one waiver paragraph.

Even if some parts are modifiable by the court later (like custody or child support), you'll face a long, expensive, emotionally draining legal battle to change them. In the meantime, you'll be stuck living under an agreement that isn't best for you or your kids.

### Key Takeaways

- Never sign anything you don't fully understand.
- Settlement agreements, parenting plans, and waivers of rights always require review.
- Pressure is a red flag. If someone's rushing you, stop.
- Get legal help. Even limited consultations can protect your future.

# ***Hey Olivia: Where Do I Even Begin the Divorce Process?***

*Hey Olivia,*

*I've gone years without even the bare minimum. He tells me daily he isn't in love with me. I have a young son and daughter, and I've tried to stick it out because life is expensive. I really don't want attorneys involved unless I have to. Where do I even begin?*

First: I'm really glad you're saying this out loud. You don't need a "big enough" reason to stop living in daily rejection. Wanting peace is enough.

Here's your beginner-friendly, clarity-first list—the stuff that actually helps:

## **1. Start with safety + steadiness**

Ask: Am I safe here emotionally and physically? Does he retaliate when I set boundaries? Does money get used as control? This determines your next steps.

## **2. Make a private "Divorce Folder" (quietly)**

Collect: tax returns, bank/credit statements, mortgage/lease, retirement accounts, insurance, pay stubs, monthly bills.

## **3. Track expenses for 7 days**

Not forever. Just one week. Real numbers = real power.

## **4. Create a "two-household reality check"**

Roughly estimate: housing, childcare, groceries, transportation, health costs. You're not manifesting doom —you're making a plan.

## **5. Learn the paths that aren't courtroom warfare**

Mediation, uncontested divorce, collaborative divorce, or a lawyer consult for information only (not "going to war").

## **6. Know when "no attorneys" stops being safe**

If money gets hidden, custody gets threatened, or he refuses to negotiate—protecting yourself isn't aggressive. It's responsible parenting.

## **7. Choose one tiny next move this week**

Pick one: start the folder, book a mediator consult, talk to a divorce coach, or build a support team.

*If you're thinking, "Okay...but what's my first step?" — that's exactly what we do at Fresh Starts Registry. We'll help you map your next right move with vetted experts, planning support, and resources for the emotional + practical parts.*



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