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divorce guide magazine

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

published by Fresh Starts Registry

**The Feminization of Wealth:
How Women Are Gaining Control
and What It Means for Your Divorce**

**When You're Not Ready to Share
(But need to, without making it a whole thing)**

**Registry Fairies:
What they are and how to become one**

**Survival Scenario:
What to Do If You Suspect Your
Spouse Is Already Talking to a Lawyer**

The Only Active Divorce Focused Magazine in the United States.

And we're pretty proud of it.

Divorce Guide Magazine

Published by Fresh Starts, Inc.

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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.

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Welcome to Divorce Guide Magazine

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.





Divorce Isn't a Solo Sport

When your life is being rebuilt, redesigned, or completely reimagined...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.

May Events from Fresh Starts



Tamar Barbash, Divorce Coach is joining Fresh Starts to host: *Forgiving Ourselves Through the Divorce Process* on Wednesday, May 6 at 12:00 PM EST. Learn more and sign up [HERE!](#)



Bridget Borel, CFP®, CDFP® is joining Fresh Starts to host: *Your Money, Rebuilt: A Post-Divorce Financial Reset for Women 40-60+* on Wednesday, May 13 at 8:00 PM EST. Learn more and sign up [HERE!](#)



Myisha Battle, Sex Coach is joining Fresh Starts to host: *Sexual Pleasure after Life Transitions* on Friday, May 15 at 8:00 PM EST. Learn more and sign up [HERE!](#)



Amy Polacko, Divorce Coach is joining Fresh Starts to host: *Recognizing The Abuser's Playbook* on Wednesday, May 20 at 12:00 PM EST. Learn more and sign up [HERE!](#)



Kristina St. Cyr, Divorce Coach is joining Fresh Starts to host: *Creating Your Divorce Transition Blueprint* on Wednesday, May 27 at 12:00 PM EST. Learn more and sign up [HERE!](#)

A Letter from Our Editor:

May I? On asking permission for your own life.

May I move out first, or does that look bad? May I be angry, or is that too much? May I start over, or is it too late? May I fall apart for a minute, or do I need to hold it together for the kids?

May. The whole word is a request. A hand raised. A pause before the sentence even starts, checking to see whether you're allowed to have the feeling you're already having.

We have been trained, most of us, to ask. To wait for the nod. To measure our grief against someone else's and decide ours is probably too loud, too small, too soon, not soon enough. To consult the imaginary rulebook that must exist somewhere — the one that tells you exactly how long to stay, exactly when it's okay to leave, exactly how much anger is appropriate and when it curdles into something you should be ashamed of.

There is no list. There is no rubric. There is no correct number of months to feel wrecked.

Here's what I know: the rulebook doesn't exist. There is no list. There is no rubric. There is no correct number of months to feel wrecked, no proper sequence of emotions that guarantees you come out the other side a person others will recognize as having done it right. No one is keeping score. And if they are, that's their problem.

May was always the wrong word. Not because permission is never worth asking for — sometimes it is, from the right people, about the right things. But the sentence "may I begin again" was never supposed to need an answer from anyone but you.

This issue is for the people still waiting for someone to tell them it's okay. Consider this the tell. You don't have to ask.

Jenny

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



10 Questions to Ask Your Real Estate Agent About Navigating the Divorce Process

Divorce brings about numerous challenges, particularly when it comes to matters surrounding your home. Amid the emotional strain and complex legalities, it is easy to overlook the importance of engaging in open conversations with your realtor about your property. However, seeking guidance from a knowledgeable real estate professional during a divorce can prove to be invaluable. Their expertise can help you navigate through the intricacies of selling, retaining, or dividing your home, ensuring that you make informed decisions that align with your goals and financial well-being. We rounded up 10 questions to ask your realtor during a divorce, highlighting their role in guiding you through the real estate aspect of your separation, and providing essential questions to ask them. By leveraging their expertise, you can approach your home matters with confidence, ultimately finding the best solution for your changing circumstances.

- 1. How can a realtor assist me in selling our marital home during the divorce?** Asking this question helps you understand the realtor's role in the selling process and how they can support you in achieving a successful sale.
- 2. What is the current market value of our home?** Inquiring about the market value helps you establish a realistic price range and ensures that you have accurate information when making decisions regarding the property.
- 3. How can we best prepare our home for sale?** Asking for advice on preparing your home for sale helps you understand what improvements or staging may be necessary to enhance its market appeal and potentially increase its value.
- 4. What is the optimal timeline for selling our home?** Inquiring about the ideal timeframe for selling your home allows you to plan your transition and align it with other aspects of the divorce process.
- 5. Can you provide information about recent comparable sales in our area?** Asking for recent comparable sales helps you gauge the market activity and determine a competitive listing price for your home.
- 6. What marketing strategies will you employ to attract potential buyers?** Inquiring about the realtor's marketing strategies allows you to assess their approach in reaching a wide range of potential buyers and increasing the visibility of your property.
- 7. How will you handle showings and negotiations with potential buyers?** Asking about the realtor's process for showings and negotiations helps you understand how they will represent your interests during these crucial stages of the home-selling process.
- 8. Can you assist us in finding suitable alternative housing options?** Inquiring about the realtor's ability to help you find new housing options allows you to leverage their expertise and potentially simplify your transition.
- 9. What fees or commissions should we expect when selling our home?** Asking about the realtor's fees and commissions helps you understand the financial implications of their services and ensures that you are prepared for these costs.
- 10. Are there any legal considerations we should be aware of regarding the sale of our home during the divorce process?** Inquiring about any legal considerations helps you ensure compliance with local laws and regulations, minimizing potential complications or delays in the sale.

Asking these questions will help you gather important information and make informed decisions about selling your marital home during the divorce process. Remember to consult with a realtor who specializes in divorce-related real estate transactions for personalized advice based on your specific situation and location.

5 Tips From a Divorce Professional

with

KRISTINA ST. CYR,
CERTIFIED DIVORCE COACH

Divorce can feel overwhelming, but the right guidance can make all the difference. Kristina St. Cyr, a Certified Divorce Coach, is sharing five powerful ways to make the divorce journey a little more manageable—and a lot less stressful.

Kristina St. Cyr, can you introduce yourself—your name, title, and the work you do?

Hi - I'm Kristina St. Cyr, a CDC Certified Divorce Coach® who helps professional women move through divorce with clarity, steadiness, and support. After navigating my own overwhelming divorce as a working mom, I now combine 15 years of leadership in public health with lived experience to guide women through decisions, co-parenting, and rebuilding with confidence. I specialize in working with women who are balancing the demands of their careers and families, and I help them to prioritize their own well-being, co-parent confidently, and achieve the financial and emotional stability they need to move forward.

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

After experiencing my own divorce as a working mother of two, I understand firsthand the emotional and logistical overwhelm of the process - from managing legal and financial complexities to co-parenting with someone I no longer trusted. That journey inspired me to become a Divorce Coach, dedicated to supporting women in reclaiming their confidence and moving forward with clarity. I do this work because everyone needs someone who gets it, who lets them know they're not alone, and who can stand with them through one of the most challenging transitions of their life.



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

Tip 1: Separate Your Emotions from the Logistics. One of the biggest reasons divorce feels paralyzing is that emotional processing and logistical tasks get tangled together. You sit down to gather financial documents and suddenly you're grieving; you try to respond to your attorney and find yourself spiraling about your future. These are two very different kinds of work, and they require different mental energy. Create separate spaces for each—dedicated time for emotional support (therapy, journaling, long walks) and separate, contained blocks for handling paperwork and decisions.

Tip 2: Stop Trying to Solve the Entire Divorce. Divorce feels overwhelming because your brain tries to process everything at once—finances, parenting, housing, legal strategy, and your future identity. That's not a task list; that's a life transition. When everything feels urgent, the nervous system often freezes, which leads to avoidance and even more overwhelm. Instead of asking, "How will I get through this divorce?" ask, "What are the next three administrative steps I need to take this week?" Limiting your focus creates clarity and makes forward movement possible.

Tip 3: Create a Weekly "Divorce CEO Hour" During divorce, you are essentially the CEO of a major life transition. But if you react to every email, update, and decision in real time, your nervous system never gets a break. A powerful shift is to create one consistent weekly block dedicated to managing the process—review correspondence, organize documents, and plan next steps. Outside of that window, disengage unless something is truly urgent. Containing the work in this way helps restore a sense of control and steadiness.

Tip 4: Gather Information Before Making Big Decisions. Many people freeze during divorce because they believe every choice is permanent and must be made immediately. In reality, the early stages of divorce are primarily about gathering information. Confusion about financial documents, legal options, or what is "normal" in the process can amplify anxiety. Instead of rushing decisions, focus on asking questions and building understanding—create lists of clarifications for your attorney or financial professionals. Clarity reduces fear and leads to better decisions.

Tip 5: Calm Your Nervous System Before Tackling Hard Tasks. When your body is in fight, flight, or freeze, even simple administrative tasks can feel impossible. Opening an email from your attorney or reviewing financial documents can trigger stress responses that make concentration difficult. Before starting logistical work, take a few minutes to regulate your nervous system—slow breathing, a short walk, or simply grounding yourself in your physical surroundings. When your body feels safer, your mind can think more clearly and handle complex decisions with greater steadiness.

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

The most important tip right now is learning to separate emotional processing from divorce logistics. Many women try to do both at the same time, which quickly leads to exhaustion and shutdown. When those two kinds of work are separated—even into small, contained blocks—it becomes much easier to make progress while still honoring the emotional reality of the experience.

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

A fresh start doesn't mean erasing the past or pretending the divorce wasn't painful. It means creating a life that feels more aligned, stable, and honest than the one you were trying to hold together before. A true fresh start is when someone moves from survival mode into a place where their decisions are guided by clarity rather than fear—and they begin to trust themselves again.

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

Learn more about
Kristina St. Cyr Coaching



Photo Adriana Kopinja Photography

Kristina St. Cyr | Kristina St. Cyr Coaching
Divorce Coach
*Able to work with clients in all 50 States and
Internationally*

You Don't Have to Navigate Divorce Alone. Start With a Divorce Resource Consult.

Feeling overwhelmed, unsure where to begin, or drowning in Google tabs? A Divorce Resource Consult is your first calm, grounded step forward.

In this 15-minute conversation with Fresh Starts co-founder Olivia Howell, you'll get clarity on what you actually need, which professionals can help, and how to move through your next decisions with confidence — not chaos. No judgment. No pressure. Just clear direction and compassionate support.

Book your **FREE** consult at divorceresourceconsult.com

Fresh Starts — Support You Can Feel.

The Registry Fairy: A Small Act That Lands Hard

Divorce means starting over. A new space, a new kitchen, a new everything — often on a budget that didn't account for any of it. Fresh Starts Registry exists to make that starting-over feel less impossible, and the Registry Fairy is one of the quietest, most powerful ways we do that.

Here's how it works: someone going through a divorce builds a Fresh Starts registry — a list of the things they actually need for their next chapter. They submit it. And then a Registry Fairy might just buy something from it.

Not a family member. Not a close friend. A stranger. Someone who signed up specifically to show up for people they've never met, with no expectation of acknowledgment or reciprocity. They don't know the registrant. The registrant may never know who they were. That anonymity isn't a limitation — it's the whole point. It's generosity without an agenda.

The Registry Fairy started as something we just quietly did. We kept a list of people who wanted to be that stranger, and when registries came in, we shared them. No fanfare, no formal launch. Just people taking care of other people in a real and tangible way.

Over time, that list has grown into a genuine community of Registry Fairies — people from all kinds of backgrounds, many of them divorce survivors themselves, who understand what it would have meant to have a stranger show up for them. Some shop every registry we send. Some act once a year. All of them get it.

If you're going through a divorce and want to submit your registry, you can do that here: freshstartsregistry.com/registry#fairy.



Get Your Fresh Starts Gear

Book Review

Sexual Pleasure For Dummies by Myisha Battle

Here's what nobody tells you when your marriage ends: you get to rediscover yourself. All of yourself. Including — maybe especially — your relationship with your own body and what you actually want.

That's why I picked up *Sexual Pleasure For Dummies* by the brilliant Myisha Battle, and why I'd hand it to every person who's ever come out the other side of a long-term relationship wondering, so... who am I now?

This book is not what the title might make you think. It's not basic. It's not clinical. It's not embarrassing to have on your nightstand. It's actually one of the most inclusive, shame-dissolving, genuinely useful guides I've read — and I say that as someone who thinks we need a lot more honest conversation about all the ways we've been taught to shrink ourselves, in and out of the bedroom.

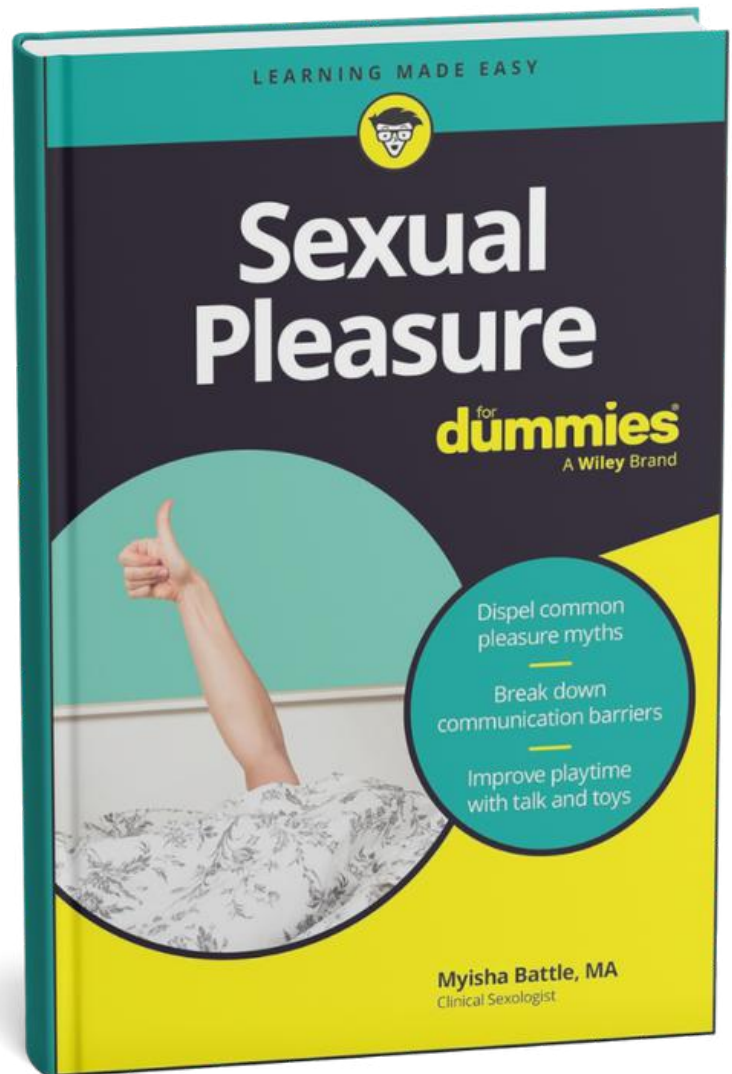
Myisha goes beyond the biology-class version of sex and digs into the stuff that actually matters: how cultural shame gets in the way, how communication transforms everything, how pleasure is a personal and evolving thing — not a performance and not a checkbox.

For anyone rebuilding after divorce, after a long relationship, after years of putting yourself last? This is a permission slip. A practical one, with real tools and zero judgment.

What I love most is that it's written for everyone — every body, every orientation, every stage of life. That's not a marketing line. You feel it on every page.

Myisha Battle has written something genuinely important here, wrapped in a package that's friendly enough that you might actually read it.

Five stars. No notes. Except maybe: start at chapter one and don't skip anything.



Pre-Order Your Copy Now

So You Want to Be a Registry Fairy

Maybe you've been through it yourself. Maybe you've watched someone you love go through it and wished there was something more concrete you could do. Maybe you just believe in showing up for strangers. Maybe you don't have a reason that fits neatly into a sentence — you just know that when you heard about this, something in you said yes. Whatever brought you here, this is for you.

A Registry Fairy is exactly what it sounds like: a person who occasionally receives a Fresh Starts registry link and decides, on their own terms, whether to purchase something from it. No formal training. No monthly commitment. No pressure. You sign up, you get added to the list, and when we have a registry to share, we'll send it your way.

The person on the other side of that link is real. They're rebuilding. They built a registry and submitted it — which takes a kind of courage that's easy to underestimate when you haven't been through it. They're not asking for anyone in particular. They're just putting something out into the world and hoping the world is kind. What you do when you receive their link is entirely up to you. You never owe anyone an explanation either way.

There's no minimum spend. No frequency requirement. No follow-up if you pass. You show up when you want to, in whatever way feels right that day. Some of our community fairies shop every registry we send. Some have only ever purchased one item — one very specific, very right item — and that was enough. Every single one of them matters.

The community of people who've said yes to this is

one of the things we're most proud of at Fresh Starts Registry. They come from all kinds of backgrounds. Many are divorce survivors themselves, people who know firsthand what it would have meant to open a package from a stranger during the hardest year of their life. Others are people who've never been through divorce and simply want a tangible, meaningful way to do something good. There's no single profile. The only real requirement is that you approach it with generosity, inclusion, and non-judgment — and that you understand the person on the other side of that registry link is real, and rebuilding, and deserving of care regardless of whether you choose to act.

Not everyone who wants to support the Registry Fairy program wants to shop a registry directly — and that's completely okay. There's another way in: contributing to the Registry Fund. The Registry Fund is a pool of community donations that Fresh Starts uses to purchase items from submitted registries on behalf of contributors. If you'd rather give in a more open-ended way, without receiving registry links or making individual decisions, you can put money into the fund and trust that it finds its way to someone who needs it. Same impact, different form of participation.

Whether you become a Registry Fairy, contribute to the fund, or do both — you're part of something genuinely rare: a community of people who decided that a stranger's fresh start was worth showing up for.

We'd be glad to add you to the list.

Become a Registry Fairy or contribute to the Registry Fund at:
freshstartsregistry.com/fairy

I'm Unmarried, Not Divorced (But Also Divorced)



by Monique Alexander, Life Coach of Monique Speaks

Learn more about Monique Speaks

As a child growing up in the 90s, my experiences were drastically different than what my children are currently navigating. Some things they will never understand include using the Dewey decimal system to find a book at the library or the importance of an encyclopedia when they have access to Wikipedia. They have no concept of life without cell phones or streaming services. And with the world of delivery at their fingertips, they will never appreciate the race in having a pizza delivered at the 61-minute mark, so it can be free of charge.

Despite these differences, what I find most challenging as a parent is navigating the athletic/competitive space of today's youth.

I remember when I first heard the term athletic supporter instead of a cheerleader, and it was at that point when I knew our society was heading in an interesting direction. No matter how you slice it or dice it, a cheerleader, is a cheerleader, is a cheerleader. This is often how I feel the world sees or even more so how I often see the word DIVORCE. It feels negative, shameful, guilt written and like a stain that remains on your heart and covers your arm sleeve forever. It's a word I want to run from so badly that I too have become part of this new generation in saying, I'm unmarried, I'm not divorced. Nonetheless, no matter how you slice it or dice it, divorce, is divorce, is divorce.

Many of us celebrate divorce as a badge of honor. However, what often goes unnoticed is the contingent of us, who did not want this, did not ask for this, and are struggling to find our way forward. It may have been a release from an abusive relationship or one day waking up unrecognizable in a marriage that no longer represented your vows. No matter the reason for the divorce, it carries a weight of despair that often taxes the body and overwhelms the spirit. Even typing the word divorce, it feels like I have done something wrong or somehow the depth and anguish of it solely falls in my lap. And all of this is underscored with one guarantee that will visit everyone at some point during this journey. Grief.

Grief will continue to be a nagging thorn that lingers on some days and utterly surprises you on others. It can send you down pathways filled of wonder and with questions such as Why? How? Who? When? Nevertheless, it's the common passage that we all must walk through, filled with many unknowns, and yet the only option to reach the other side.

Ultimately, we must remember, I must, remember that in order to move forward, I have to move through. And in order to move through, I have to stand steadfast in my truth. And the fact of the matter is, that truth states...I am unmarried and I'm also divorced.

The Book:

Divorce Happens

A Compassionate Guide to Starting Fresh

Published by Sheldon Press | Hachette UK · Coming late August 2027

Stay in the know: freshstartsregistry.com/book

How I Announced My Divorce: Tom Arnold

Comedian and actor Tom Arnold has been through divorce more than once — before and after the internet had opinions about everything. That distinction matters more than you'd think.

In this episode of Divorce Happens, Tom talks about what it's actually like to announce a divorce when tabloids control the narrative versus when social media does. Spoiler: neither is fun. But Tom finds the humor in it — and the hard-won wisdom underneath.

A lot of the conversation centers on single fatherhood. Becoming a solo parent mid-life isn't something most people plan for, and Tom doesn't pretend it's easy. He's candid about the steep learning curve and the emotional weight of it — if you're a single dad just trying to figure out how to get out of bed some mornings, this one's for you.

There's also a fascinating thread about publicists — how having one (or not) shapes the way your story gets told during a very public, very personal

moment. What you'll take away: practical resilience, a little permission to be messy, and a reminder that transparency is usually the better path.



Click through to listen!

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The Feminization of Wealth: How Women Are Gaining Control — and What It Means for Your Financial Future



by **Bridget Borel, Financial Planner founder of Clairwell Financial Planning**

Learn more about Clairwell Financial Planning

We are living through a quiet revolution in the financial world: women are stepping into unprecedented control of wealth. Over the past five years, women's share of global financial wealth has grown faster than men's, and that trend shows no signs of slowing down.

This is more than just a shift in numbers. It's a transformation in how wealth is earned, held, and used to shape families, communities, and legacies.

The Forces Behind the Shift

In the United States alone, an estimated \$30 trillion is expected to transfer from one generation to the next in the coming decade, much of it into the hands of women. Because women live, on average, five to six years longer than men, they are far more likely to become the financial decision-makers in their households later in life. And as family dynamics continue to evolve — with more women remaining unmarried, facing divorce, or leading as the primary earners in their homes — the pattern becomes clear: women are increasingly steering financial decisions not just for themselves, but for their families.

The Current Landscape

The impact is already visible. And you may be living it yourself — taking an active role in building and managing your wealth as well as your family's day-to-day budget. Today, women control roughly one-third of global personal financial wealth, and projections suggest that share will rise steadily over the next decade. In the U.S., women's financial

assets grew from about \$10 trillion in 2018 to \$18 trillion just five years later — and analysts expect that figure to nearly double again, to \$34 trillion, by 2030.

Beyond investment accounts, women's influence extends into nearly every corner of the economy. In fact, women are behind the majority of household purchasing decisions, from essentials to healthcare, travel, and education. Taken together, these numbers remind us that women's financial power is not a niche trend. It's a defining force in the global economy.

A Different Approach to Investing

What's equally fascinating is how women tend to approach investing once they're at the helm. Studies show that women are often more disciplined and thoughtful, less likely to trade impulsively, and more inclined to take a long-term view. Their decisions are frequently tied to goals and values — supporting a family, giving back to their community, or aligning with charitable causes they care about — rather than chasing quick returns for the sake of growing their accounts.

And yet, a surprising share of women's wealth remains on the sidelines, sitting unmanaged or underutilized. By some estimates, this represents a \$10 trillion opportunity by the end of the decade. The question isn't whether women will control wealth — that's already happening — but how they will choose to put that wealth to work.

Where the Financial Industry Fell Short

Despite all this progress, the financial industry has not historically done a great job of meeting women where they are. For decades, the standard model of financial advice was built with men in mind. Meetings often focused on performance metrics rather than personal goals. Conversations were filled with jargon that left many clients feeling overwhelmed. And too often, advisors failed to recognize the impact of major life transitions like divorce, career breaks, or widowhood — all of which disproportionately affect women.

The good news is that things are changing. As an advisor, I see this in the number of women working in the industry (though in a room of firm owners, I'm often the only woman).

Today, women clients are demanding more — and they deserve it. The future of financial advice must be more relational than transactional. It must begin with listening, not lecturing. It must center on values and goals, not just numbers on a statement. And it must offer strategies that empower women during life's biggest transitions, rather than leaving them to navigate uncertainty alone.

This is exactly where my work at Clairwell begins. My practice is rooted in the belief that women deserve a safe, supportive space to explore their financial options and step confidently into ownership of their wealth.

The Freedom That Comes with Financial Confidence
When women feel confident about their finances, something remarkable happens: doors open. Having control over money doesn't just mean paying the bills on time or watching an account balance grow — it means having the freedom to make choices that align with your life, your values, and your dreams.

Financial confidence creates space to say yes to new expansive opportunities and no to obligations that no longer serve you. It means being able to walk away

from an unhealthy relationship, take a career risk, or fund a cause that lights you up. It allows you to plan for the future without fear and to enjoy the present without guilt.

At its core, money is a tool — and when women feel empowered in using that tool, they gain more than financial security. They gain options, autonomy, and the ability to shape the life they want to live.

Why This Matters

As women continue to gain control of wealth, the ripple effects will be felt everywhere: in families, in businesses, in philanthropy, and in the causes women choose to support. For those navigating transitions — whether it's divorce, widowhood, or a career change — money isn't just about dollars and cents. It's about security, confidence, and the freedom to shape the next chapter of life.

That's why this moment matters. And it's why I believe the future of financial planning should look different from the past.

Taking the Next Step

If you're stepping into greater financial responsibility, I want you to know this: you are not alone. You don't need to figure it all out by yourself. This is your moment to own your power and create a plan that reflects not just your finances, but your values, your goals, and your story.

I'd love to start that conversation with you. Together, we can build a plan that brings clarity, confidence, and peace of mind as you move forward.

Clairwell Financial Planning: Where women find clarity, confidence, and connection in their financial journey.

Affordable Legal Help: How to Find Divorce Attorneys with Payment Plans

Hiring a lawyer can feel out of reach—especially when you’re navigating a divorce, custody dispute, or other family law issue with limited resources. But here’s something most people don’t know: some attorneys offer payment plans, flat-fee services, or “unbundled” legal help so you don’t have to come up with thousands of dollars upfront.

If you're in the middle of a big life change and need legal support, this might be the affordable solution you've been looking for.

How to Find an Attorney Who Offers Payment Plans for Divorce or Family Law

What Are Attorney Payment Plans?

Many family law attorneys understand that clients can't always afford to pay their full fee upfront—especially during major transitions like divorce. Some offer:

- Monthly payment plans for full legal services
- Flat-fee packages for uncontested divorces or specific services
- Unbundled (limited scope) legal services, like help with just one part of your case

Why Asking About Payment Plans Is a Smart Move:

- You get professional legal support without the full upfront cost
- You can budget your legal fees over time
- You get access to justice, even on a tight income
- It's perfect for uncontested divorces or straightforward legal issues

How to Ask About Payment Plans

It can feel uncomfortable to bring up money—but lawyers are used to this question, and asking upfront

can save you time and stress later.

Here's how to start the conversation confidently:

Phone Script: Calling to Ask About Payment Plans

You: Hi, my name is [Your Name], and I'm looking for help with a [divorce / custody case / family law matter]. I'm wondering if your office offers payment plans or flat-fee options? I'd love to schedule a consultation if that's something you offer.

If they ask for more info: *My case is [briefly explain—uncontested divorce, custody agreement, etc.], and I want to make sure I can afford legal help while staying within my budget.*

What to Say During a Consultation With a Lawyer

If you've booked a consultation, be clear and direct: *"Before we move forward, I want to be upfront about my budget. Do you offer payment plans, sliding-scale fees, or unbundled services?"*

This helps you both understand what's possible and avoid financial surprises later.

How to Find Divorce Lawyers Who Offer Payment Plans

Search Online with the Right Keywords

Use search terms like:

- “Family law attorney with payment plans near me”
- “Flat-fee divorce lawyer [City/State]”
- “Unbundled legal services for divorce”

Check Their Website

Some attorneys will mention payment flexibility directly on their site under Services, FAQ, or Pricing. Look for terms like:

- Sliding-scale
- Payment plans available
- Affordable family law help

Ask for Referrals

Reach out to local legal aid clinics, family resource centers, or even courthouse self-help desks and ask: “Do you know of any attorneys in the area who offer payment plans or limited-scope services for divorce?”

Additional Tips

- Be honest about your budget—it saves time and ensures the right fit
- Get a written agreement outlining the payment terms
- Ask about what’s included in flat-fee or unbundled packages
- Even one hour with a lawyer can help you make more confident decisions

You don’t have to choose between going into debt and going to court alone. There are family law attorneys who want to work with your budget—and asking the right questions is the first step.

Legal support should be accessible, even during tough times. A payment plan might be the bridge that gets you the help you need without the financial panic.

Get divorced for \$299

I want a divorce, but where do I even start?



Trusted by over 1,036 people

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Untangle

The Eye of the Storm



by Robyn Gaillard, Mind-Body Connection Wellness Educator and Clinician
of Mind-Body Connection Integration Healing Arts

Learn more about Mind-Body Connection Integration Healing Arts

My son turned four during a particularly swirly period of time. Two weeks earlier, I left the family house. I was staying with my son at my mother's until I moved into our next house. We made arrangements to meet at a restaurant with his dad so we could all be together and celebrate (His family? The family? Our family? Still in pronoun transition, too...Daddy to your dad... mommy to your mom...).

It was a peace-filled and joyful birthday lunch. Thankfully we were protected on our son's birthday by the love we share for him. There was a rainstorm outside that day, however, and when lunch was over, we all drove away during very whipped up weather.

My son fell asleep. I cried. The hazard lights were on, and I gripped the steering wheel while driving on the straight, long road while the rain poured down.

I cried because I actually felt the grace surrounding me. I cried because I still felt like we were a family who loves each other even though how we live and look will be different. I cried because It's hard to experience good moments during hard times and not wonder, why can't we just be a family? And I cried because I understood it all. I understood how I was healing. I understood how I can still be loving and set boundaries. And it was not lost on me to stay the course no matter the weather.

On that special day, we loved and lunched together in the eye of the storm.



How to Get Divorced as a Stay at Home Parent

If you're a stay-at-home parent ready to leave your marriage but don't know how to afford it, this guide is for you. Written with compassion and practicality, this judgment-free book walks you through the legal, emotional, and logistical steps of getting a divorce without income. Inside, you'll find checklists, scripts, budget-friendly strategies, and powerful self-care tools to help you reclaim your future—on your terms. You don't need a paycheck to take back your power. You just need a plan—and this is it.

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David Fein

David Fein, Divorce Mediator and Family Law Attorney

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 David Fein, a Divorce Mediator and Family Law Attorney, whose work helps clients find clarity, strength, and a true fresh start.

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

I am a lawyer, mediator, and founder of Fein Legal Solutions, LLC (dba The Law Office of David Fein), based in suburban Chicago. My practice is dedicated to helping individuals and families navigate high-stakes life transitions through family law, divorce mediation, and collaborative solutions.

What led me here was a desire to align my professional expertise with a more personal mission. For nearly three decades, I operated in high-level corporate advocacy and complex energy regulation. While I found success untangling large-scale systemic issues, I reached a point where I wanted to apply that same analytical precision to something more human. I realized that families facing divorce are often overwhelmed by a similar kind of 'regulatory' chaos - a mix of legal hurdles, financial restructuring, and emotional upheaval.

As a father of three, I understand that the true goal of any legal transition is the long-term health and dignity of the family. I use my background as a strategic problem-solver to act as a bridge-builder, replacing the traditional adversarial model with a structured, low-conflict roadmap. My goal is to help

clients move through their most difficult chapters with their finances, integrity, and futures intact.

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

My inspiration stems from the belief that big life transitions deserve the same level of rigorous, strategic thinking as complex corporate mergers - but with a far greater degree of human empathy. Throughout my career, I have navigated high-stakes regulatory environments where clarity and stability are the ultimate goals. I realized that individuals facing divorce or significant late-life shifts are often overwhelmed by a similar kind of 'regulatory' chaos: a mix of legal hurdles, financial restructuring, and emotional upheaval.

I am driven by the challenge of untangling these complexities. Whether it is a 'gray divorce' involving decades of intertwined assets or a family seeking a child-centric path forward, my goal is to provide a structured, calm environment. People in transition don't just need a legal technician; they need a guide who understands that behind every financial spreadsheet is a human story and a future that needs protection. By blending the precision of a seasoned advocate with the patience of a mediator, I help clients transform a period of high-stress uncertainty into a manageable, dignified transition toward their next chapter.

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

My specialty lies in navigating high-stakes personal transitions through mediation and collaborative family law. I support my clients by moving away from the traditional, adversarial 'win-loss' model, focusing instead on structured, low-conflict solutions that prioritize long-term stability and the well-being of the family unit.

While my background includes deep experience in

complex regulatory and policy environments, I apply those same analytical skills to family law. I typically support my clients by acting as a strategic navigator. Whether I am facilitating a divorce mediation, drafting a comprehensive parenting plan, or advising on intricate financial divisions, my method is to replace the inherent chaos of transition with a clear, manageable roadmap.

I empower my clients to retain control over their outcomes rather than leaving their future to the uncertainty of a courtroom. By blending professional precision with a child-centric, empathetic approach, I ensure my clients emerge from their legal transitions with their financial security intact and a dignified path forward for their next chapter.

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dignified path forward for their next chapter.

What makes your approach to working with clients unique?

What sets my approach apart is that I didn't spend my career in the adversarial trenches of the courtroom; I spent it at the heights of complex systems and high-stakes negotiation. Coming to family law and mediation from a background in large-scale advocacy and regulation gives me a unique 'outsider's advantage.' I don't view every case through the lens of a looming battle, but rather as a complex puzzle that requires a structured, strategic resolution.

This perspective allows me to bring a level of analytical 'calm' and objectivity that is often missing in traditional family law. My methodology is built on consensus-building rather than conflict-escalation. I treat a life transition as a project to be managed with precision, transparency, and empathy, rather than a drama to be litigated.

By applying the same rigor used to untangle large-scale policy issues to the personal 'regulatory' chaos of a divorce, I offer a truly collaborative framework. I act as a bridge-builder, helping clients move past the emotional noise to focus on sustainable, long-term outcomes. My goal is to ensure they emerge from the process not just with a legal agreement, but with their finances, their dignity, and their future stability firmly intact.

My goal is to ensure they emerge from the process not just with a legal agreement, but with their finances, their dignity, and their future stability firmly intact.

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

People are often surprised to learn that my professional roots aren't in family law, but in the highly technical world of energy policy and regulation. They expect a divorce mediator to have spent decades in a courtroom; instead, I spent my career untangling complex systems and high-stakes corporate negotiations. This background is actually my 'secret weapon' - it allows me to bring a level of strategic calm and analytical precision to a family's financial transition that is quite rare in the traditional legal space.

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

My connection with my clients is rooted in the intentionality of my own professional journey and my role as a father. I spent a long career navigating high-stakes corporate and regulatory environments, but as my own three children reached adulthood, my perspective on 'success' shifted. I realized I wanted to apply my problem-solving skills to something more personally impactful - helping people navigate their most significant life transitions with grace.

Choosing to pivot into family law and mediation was a deliberate mission to do work that matters at the kitchen-table level. I think clients feel that; they know I've intentionally chosen to be in their corner. Because I am a father first, I look at every case through the lens of legacy. While the financial and legal complexities are real, they are secondary to the human relationships involved. When I help a family, I'm not just focused on the immediate agreement; I'm thinking about the future milestones - the graduations and weddings where parents need to stand together with their dignity and peace intact. My goal is to meet my clients with the same level of care, patience, and commitment I would want for my own family's future.

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

After a day spent untangling complex legal and emotional puzzles, I find my best reset through a mix of simple local pleasures. As a lifelong Chicago sports fan, there's nothing like the ritual of a Blackhawks, Bulls, Bears, or White Sox game to shift my focus. Whether I'm cheering on a home team or unwinding by working in my yard, those moments allow me to step away from the analytical and reconnect with the tangible.

I'm also a firm believer in the 'slow reset.' That might mean heading up to my "happy place" in northern Wisconsin or going out to one of my favorite local restaurants like Washington Gardens, Carson's, or Scotty's or simply relaxing at home with a great glass of Cabernet or a smooth Tequila. For me, these moments aren't just about relaxation; they're about shifting gears and finding balance. Transition is a theme that runs through my professional life, so I've learned the importance of creating those clear boundaries for myself - recharging so I can bring my best, calmest energy back to my clients the next morning.

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

Structure, Empathy, Transition.

What does "fresh start" mean to you personally?

To me, a 'fresh start' isn't just about leaving something behind; it's about the intentional act of building something new on a foundation of clarity and self-awareness. Personally, I experienced my own fresh start when I pivoted from a career in high-stakes corporate regulation to found my own firm. It was a move toward alignment - aligning my professional skills with my personal values as a father and a community member.

In my work with clients, a fresh start means the moment the 'noise' of a crisis subsides and is replaced by a structured roadmap for the future. It's the transition from a state of being overwhelmed by complexity to a state of being empowered by choice. I believe a true fresh start is only possible when you've handled the ending with dignity. By helping

my clients resolve their legal and financial challenges through a low-conflict, collaborative process, I'm not just helping them close a chapter; I'm ensuring they have the emotional and financial resources to make their next chapter their most meaningful one yet.

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

David Fein, Fein Legal Solutions

Mediator

Able to work with clients in Illinois

[Learn more about Fein Legal Solutions](#)



Jenny Says So

I'm not okay, but I'm also not up for sharing

Dear Jenny,

I'm newly separated and trying to keep my life functioning like a normal person—emails, meetings, deadlines, small talk. But I feel like I'm carrying this huge invisible thing into the office every day.

A few coworkers have noticed I'm quieter. Someone asked if I'm "okay" in that tone that means they already suspect something. Another person made an offhand joke about marriage that landed like a brick in my stomach. I don't want to announce my divorce at work, but I also don't want to seem secretive or icy when I dodge questions.

Here's the complication: I'm not asking for a group hug. I'm asking for predictability. If I need to swap a meeting because of a mediation appointment, or I'm suddenly doing school pickup solo, I don't want to keep making vague excuses that feel awkward and untrue. But I'm terrified if I share it, it becomes office gossip—or people start treating me like a fragile little bird.

Do I have to tell my coworkers? If so, how do I do it in a way that's professional, boundaried, and not a whole "thing"?

Love,

Treading Lightly in Tennessee

Dear Treading Lightly,

You don't owe your coworkers your personal life. But you can share a simple, strategic version when it makes your work life easier. Think of it like this: you're not making an announcement—you're setting context.

Etiquette-wise, you tell people on a need-to-know basis: your manager (if scheduling/flexibility might come up), HR (if you need policy support), and a trusted teammate only if it directly affects workflow.

Use VASE: Validate, Acknowledge, Support, Express—short and professional.

To your manager: "Quick personal update: I'm going through a divorce. I'm managing it, but I may have a few appointments that impact scheduling. I'll keep you posted early and make sure coverage is handled. I'd appreciate keeping this private."

To a coworker who asks: "Thanks for checking in. I'm dealing with a family change and keeping it pretty private, but I appreciate you."

If someone pries: "I'm not discussing details, but thank you for understanding."

You're allowed to protect your privacy and ask for what you need. That's not oversharing. That's good workplace boundaries.

Jenny

Find Jenny Says So in all places you listen to podcasts!

Listen to Jenny Says So

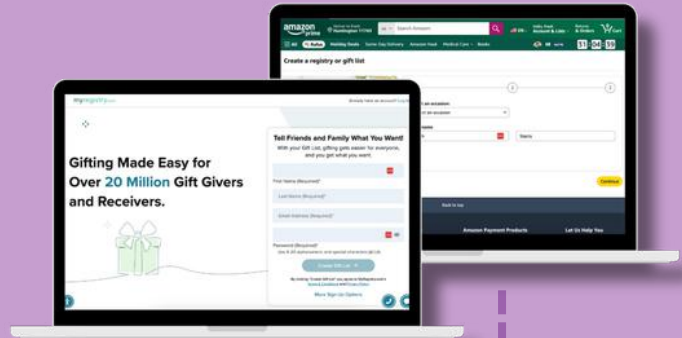
Ask Jenny a Question



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. She will share your registry with the Community Registry Fairies who also may support your registry!

Get supported by your community during your time of rebuild!



SURVIVAL SCENARIOS

What to Do If You Suspect Your Spouse Is Talking to a Divorce Lawyer

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 just overheard my spouse on the phone with a divorce lawyer. My heart dropped—I don’t even know what to do or say. Do I confront them? Call my own lawyer? Pretend I didn’t hear it? I feel blindsided and terrified this is the beginning of the end.



Guidance from Tamar Barbash, Accredited Breakup and Divorce Coach

Tamar Barbash, Divorce Coach

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

What’s the First Step I Should Take If I Suspect They’re Preparing for Divorce?

The first step in almost every scenario is the same: take a beat. You never want to react too quickly, or let your emotions navigate your next move. So pause. Take a breath. This is a good time to get in touch with what you want. This scenario often leads down a path where you begin thinking about things entirely in terms of what your partner wants, or what you think they may want. It’s a good time to get clarity around what you want, so that you can better decide what your next steps should be.

How Can I Gather Information Without Escalating Conflict?

One important thing to think about that doesn’t involve conflict is: what is a realistic budget that I could live on? Make a list of the expenses you are aware of and think about what you’d need in order to afford to live your life. Make note of any information that you don’t have access to that impacts this information.

What Professionals Should I Consult Proactively?

Contrary to popular belief, you do not need to

immediately find an attorney. The most useful call you can make is to a divorce coach who can help you consider your options and strategize a plan, including what other professionals – legal, financial etc – might be useful.

There are many ways to get divorced, several of which do not involve court. A divorce coach can help you identify exactly what your needs are, get clarity around how you want your divorce to look, and help you determine the steps to take the make it happen.

Most importantly: just because your spouse may be the one who initiates the process, that doesn’t mean that you have to cede control to them. You can and should be an active participant in how your own divorce process goes and the best way to do that is to have a coach who can support you through it.

Key Takeaway: You Don’t Have to Give Up Control

Overhearing your spouse talk to a divorce lawyer can feel devastating, but it doesn’t mean you’re powerless. By pausing, clarifying what you want, gathering financial details, and connecting with the right professionals, you can take back agency in the process.

How to Borrow Money from Friends or Family to Start the Divorce Process (Without Burning Bridges)

When you're ready to move forward with a divorce but don't have the funds to cover filing fees or legal help, it can feel like you're stuck. One option many people overlook is turning to a trusted friend or family member for a short-term loan—with a clear, respectful repayment plan in place.

It might feel uncomfortable at first, but with honesty, structure, and follow-through, borrowing from someone you trust can be a smart, empowering solution.

Asking a loved one for temporary financial help so you can cover the immediate costs of starting your divorce—like filing fees, service fees, or initial legal consultations.

This isn't asking for a handout. It's asking for a bridge—a way to move forward now while planning to pay them back soon.

Bridge, Not Burden: How to Borrow from Loved Ones to Take the First Step Toward Divorce

Why This Is a Smart Option

- It gives you immediate access to legal support
- You avoid high-interest credit cards or predatory loans
- It lets you take action without waiting for “perfect” circumstances
- You can create a clear repayment plan that respects both parties

Scripts and Tips for How to Ask for Financial Help from People in Your Life

Whether you ask over the phone or in person, the key is to be honest, specific, and prepared. Here's how to approach the conversation:

Conversation Script: Asking for Help Respectfully

“I want to talk to you about something that's hard for me to ask. I'm trying to move forward with filing for divorce, and I don't have the money to cover the court costs right now. I need about \$500 to file and serve the papers. I'm asking if you'd be open to lending it to me short-term—I can repay \$100 per month starting in [month].”

Optional Add-On:

“I'm happy to write up a repayment agreement or track everything in writing so we both feel comfortable.”

Tips for a Smooth Conversation

- Be transparent about how the money will be used
- Offer a specific repayment plan and timeline
- Respect a “no”—not everyone is in a place to help, and that's okay
- Follow up in writing to confirm the details if they say yes

Make It Official (Even If It's Informal)

To avoid tension later, put the agreement in writing. It doesn't have to be complicated. Here's a basic sample:

Simple Loan Agreement Example

Date: [MM/DD/YYYY]

Borrower: [Your Name]

Lender: [Their Name]

Loan Amount: \$500

Repayment Plan: \$100/month, starting [Month, Year]

Final Payment Due: [Final Month, Year]

Notes: Payments will be made via [Venmo / PayPal / Cash / Bank Transfer].

Signatures:

_____ (Your Name) _____, _____ (Their Name) _____

Action Steps to Get Started

Make a list of trusted people you feel safe asking (think emotionally supportive + financially stable)

1. Write out exactly what you need and when you can repay
2. Practice your ask—whether it's a phone call, text, or in-person conversation
3. Be clear about the purpose of the funds (filing fees, legal advice, etc.)
4. Put it in writing once agreed to protect both sides

Real Talk: It's Okay to Ask for Help

Asking for money can feel vulnerable—but this is about investing in your future, your safety, and your peace of mind. People who love you want to see you move forward. When you come prepared and respectful, it shows you're taking your next chapter seriously.

Legal support shouldn't be out of reach just because you're in a hard financial season. Borrowing from someone who believes in you—with a clear plan to pay them back—can give you the breathing room to move forward with confidence.

And remember: you're not failing by asking for support—you're taking a bold, empowered step toward your fresh start.

Divorce 101 A–Z:

M Is for Mediation (and May)



May is a month of growth and possibility. It's when things begin to open, stretch, and soften after a long winter. That makes it a fitting time to talk about one of the most effective—and often misunderstood—paths through divorce: mediation.

Mediation is a structured process where a neutral third party helps two people work through divorce decisions together. The mediator doesn't take sides, make rulings, or tell anyone what to do. Instead, they guide conversations, clarify options, and help both parties reach agreements that feel workable and fair. For many couples, mediation offers something rare during divorce: a sense of control. Rather than handing decisions to a judge who doesn't know your family, mediation allows you to shape outcomes around parenting, finances, support, and the division of assets with intention. It can be especially helpful for people who want to preserve a functional co-parenting relationship or minimize emotional and financial strain.

That said, mediation isn't appropriate for every situation. If there's a history of abuse, intimidation, or significant power imbalance, mediation may not provide the safety or structure needed. Knowing

whether mediation is right for you is part of being informed—not a sign of success or failure.

May reminds us that growth requires the right conditions. Mediation works best when both people are willing to engage honestly, disclose financial information, and negotiate in good faith. When those conditions are present, mediation can reduce conflict, lower costs, and move the process forward with dignity.

If you're navigating divorce this spring, mediation is worth understanding—even if you ultimately choose a different path. Because knowing your options is how you move from reaction to intention. And intention, in divorce, can make all the difference.



Listen to Divorce 101!

What People Don't Understand about working with a High-Conflict Divorce Coach

Photo Emma J. Smith

with

RINA GROENEVELD

From the outside, divorce can seem simple: paperwork, court dates, and moving on. But as Rina Groeneveld, a High-conflict divorce coach, knows from working with countless clients, the reality is far more complicated. Here's what most people don't understand about divorce.

Rina, can you introduce yourself—your name, role, and how you support people during divorce?

I'm Rina Groeneveld, a CDC Certified Divorce Coach® and One Moms Battle High Conflict Divorce Coach. I work with protective moms who are divorcing or in a custody battle with a coercive controller and are going through hell in and out of family court. I help them communicate strategically, document abuse effectively, manage their emotional responses, and show up in court as a calm, credible parent.



I write a weekly newsletter read by hundreds of protective parents dealing with high-conflict divorce, custody battles, and post-separation abuse. Each issue translates complex frameworks like coercive control, court strategy, communication tactics, and many more into practical, actionable guidance for people who are in the thick of it and need real help, not ranting or platitudes.

I'm also the author of *AI Armor: Your Digital Defense Solution for Coparenting with a Narcissist*. The book draws on my experience as a victim of post-separation abuse and my expertise as a divorce coach, translator, and communication expert to help victims of post-separation abuse use AI as an effective strategic thinking partner.

www.divorceguidemagazine.com

Why did you choose to specialize in divorce work?

I didn't choose this work. It chose me. I left my abusive husband in 2012 after nearly 25 years together. What followed our separation—revenge porn, smear campaigns against me, financial abuse, litigation abuse, being forced to fend alone for my children and me in Canada when my ex left the country—opened my eyes to the reality of high-conflict divorce.

I built a six-figure translation business from scratch while fighting him in court and raising four kids. When I started a small venting group with two friends, it grew into a local online support group that

Page 33

now has over 300 members. I realized that I needed tools to help my group members, so I trained as a divorce coach.

In your experience, what's the #1 thing people don't understand about divorce?

That when you're divorcing a coercive controller, the divorce doesn't end the abuse. It escalates it. The family court system becomes the abuser's new weapon. Child support, custody schedules, parenting coordination all get turned into tools of control. People assume divorce is a clean break. For survivors of coercive control, it's the start of a new and often more dangerous chapter.

What are some common myths you see (from TV, movies, or general assumptions) that just aren't true?

People think that the court will "figure it out" and protect the children. Courts aren't equipped to identify coercive control. Even in places where the laws are changing to acknowledge coercive control, judges are often focused on evidence of physical violence, not the years of psychological warfare that preceded it.

Another myth is that if you're telling the truth, you'll be believed. Truth without strategy rarely wins in family court. And the most damaging myth of all is one that court experts all too frequently believe: that a good co-parenting relationship is always possible. You cannot co-parent with someone who uses your children as leverage.

What do friends and family often misunderstand about supporting someone going through divorce?

They want it to be over, so they encourage the person to move on or stop engaging. What they don't realize is that when children are involved, you can't disengage. Your ex has court-mandated access to

you for years. Friends and family also tend to see the charming, reasonable version of the abuser and often assume that the problem is on both sides. That can be devastating for someone already being gaslit by their ex and the legal system simultaneously.

What do clients often wish they had known earlier in the process?

That every communication with their ex is a legal document. Every email, every text, every voicemail. The people who understand this from the start protect themselves so much better than those who spend the first year venting in writing to an abuser who is screen-shotting everything. I always say: write as if you're writing to the judge, and cc'ing the narcissist. If you wouldn't want a judge to read it, don't send it.

They also wish they had understood earlier that the goal isn't to get their ex to cooperate, admit wrongdoing, or behave reasonably. That hope keeps people stuck in a cycle of provocation and reaction that their ex is very deliberately engineering. The sooner you accept that you are dealing with someone who has no interest in resolution, and only wants to control you, the sooner you can stop playing their game and start playing your own.

And almost universally, they wish they had started documenting sooner. Not just saving messages, but building a clear, organized, factual record that tells a coherent story to someone who knows nothing about their situation. Too often, victims are told "just leave" without being given any inkling that the abuse will continue. The most successful of my clients are the ones who researched what happens after you leave an abuser and started shifting gears and being strategic right away.

How do emotions, finances, and legal realities often clash in ways people don't expect?

Your emotional need for acknowledgment is in direct conflict with your legal strategy. Every time you try to get your ex to admit what they did or validate you, or give you closure, you hand them ammunition. You have to learn to respond in ways that are counter-intuitive and totally the opposite of how you'd respond if your ex was a normal person, acting in good faith.

Financially, your ex knows that litigation costs you money you may not have, and they use that. They file motions not because they'll win, but because it drains you. They would rather throw away the cost of your children's future and their life savings in a protracted legal battle than let you get even one cent of it.

Legally, the system is set up as if both parties are operating in good faith. When one of them isn't, the whole thing breaks down, and the reasonable parent pays the price. Judges assume that both parents are equally responsible for a high-conflict situation, even though it's a continuation of domestic violence. They look for the most credible parent. A domestic violence victim, with their trauma response, often doesn't fit this mold, while an abuser can come across as charming, credible, and persuasive.

From your perspective, what makes divorce harder than people imagine?

The loneliness of not being believed. The people closest to you start to get compassion fatigue. The court professionals may not understand what they're looking at. You're expected to perform wellness and stability while someone is actively trying to destroy your life. And you have to do all of this while being a present, emotionally available parent to children who are being caught in the middle.

What's more, abuse victims have already been broken down by the time they get to divorce. Years

of coercive control, with the gaslighting, the isolation, the financial abuse, the constant erosion of their confidence and sense of reality, mean they're starting this process from a deficit. They're expected to navigate one of the most complex legal and emotional experiences of their life while they're dealing with trauma responses that the other side will use against them. Hypervigilance gets labeled as paranoia. Emotional dysregulation gets labeled as instability. The symptoms of the abuse become evidence against the victim.

What makes it easier, once people understand it better?

Shifting from reactive to strategic. The moment a client stops trying to get their ex to understand or admit anything, and starts focusing entirely on how they appear to the decision-makers, and how they relate to their children, everything changes. You can't control your ex. You can control your documentation, your communication style, how you interact with your children, and your presentation. That's where your power lies.

How do you guide clients through these hidden truths?

I help them depersonalize the chaos. When you understand that your ex's behavior follows a predictable pattern, not because you provoked it, but because that's who they are, it stops feeling like something you need to fix.

We work on communication strategy, documentation habits, court presentation, and the mindset shifts that make all of it sustainable.

I've been where they are, so I'm able to enter their emotional world and validate them. At the same time, I don't allow them to spin off into catastrophizing or self-blame. I help them pivot back to strategic thinking and focusing on their end goal.

My aim is to empower my clients to walk out of this process knowing they did everything they could to protect themselves and their children, and that they did it with integrity. Not just to survive their divorce or custody battle, but to come out on the other side with their sense of self intact, ready to build the life they and their children deserve.

What's one message you wish every person could hear about divorce?

Self-insight is your most powerful tool in this process. Knowing your triggers, understanding your patterns, recognizing when you're being manipulated all give you the foundation everything else is built on. The clients who make the most progress aren't necessarily the ones with the best lawyers or the most evidence. They're the ones who know themselves well enough to stay grounded when their ex is doing everything possible to destabilize them.

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



*Rina Groeneveld, Life After An Abusive Relationship Divorce Coach
Able to work with clients in all 50 states and Internationally*

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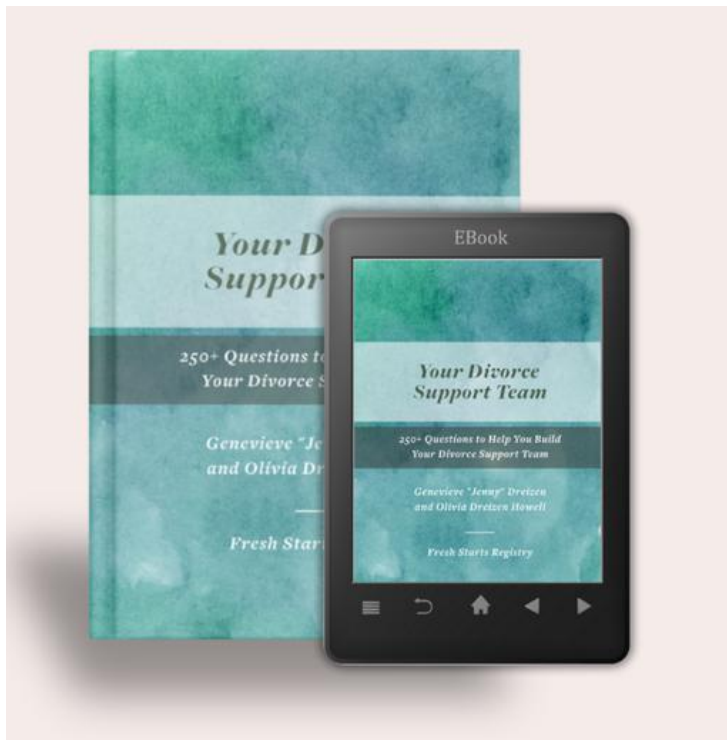
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What To Consider When You're Considering Divorce: Your Health, Mental Health, And Self-care

Deciding to divorce is never an easy choice, and the process can be emotionally, mentally, and physically taxing. Before taking the first steps, it's essential to prioritize your well-being—because navigating divorce requires resilience and clarity. From managing stress and emotional upheaval to ensuring you stay physically healthy, focusing on self-care is a crucial foundation for making sound decisions.

In this post, we'll explore the key considerations for protecting your health and mental health during this challenging time, as well as practical tips for self-care. Whether you're in the early stages of contemplation or preparing to take action, caring for yourself is the first step toward building a brighter future.

4 Essential Considerations for Your Physical Health When Considering Divorce

Prioritize Regular Medical Checkups

- **What It Is:** Ensuring you maintain regular appointments with your primary care physician to assess your overall physical health.
- **Why It's Important:** Stress from considering or undergoing a divorce can take a toll on your physical health, potentially leading to issues like high blood pressure, headaches, or sleep disturbances. Catching and addressing these issues early helps you maintain the strength needed to navigate this challenging time.
- **Experts Who Can Help:** Primary care physicians and general practitioners.
- **How to Ask for Help:** Schedule a wellness checkup. When you meet with your doctor, explain, "I'm experiencing a significant amount of stress right now. Are there any ways I can better manage my physical health during this time? Could you help me identify potential health risks I should monitor?"

Create a Consistent Exercise Routine

- **What It Is:** Establishing a manageable fitness routine to release stress, improve sleep, and boost mood.
- **Why It's Important:** Exercise is a proven way to reduce stress hormones and increase endorphins, which can help you cope with emotional challenges. Physical activity also ensures you're taking time to focus on yourself.
- **Experts Who Can Help:** Personal trainers, fitness instructors, or physical therapists (if you have pre-existing injuries).
- **How to Ask for Help:** Meet with a trainer or instructor and explain, "I'm looking for an exercise routine that fits into a busy and stressful schedule. Can you help me design something simple and effective that promotes stress relief?"

Focus on Nutrition and Meal Planning

- **What It Is:** Maintaining a balanced diet to support your energy levels and immune system.
- **Why It's Important:** Emotional stress can often lead to poor eating habits, which can weaken your body and make you more vulnerable to illness. Proper nutrition is essential for keeping your body strong during periods of uncertainty.
- **Experts Who Can Help:** Registered dietitians or nutritionists.
- **How to Ask for Help:** Contact a nutritionist to discuss stress-related eating habits. Ask, "I'm going through a potentially stressful life change. Could you recommend meal planning strategies or foods that can help me manage energy and stress levels better?"

Prioritize Sleep and Rest

- **What It Is:** Establishing healthy sleep patterns and making rest a priority during this transition.
- **Why It's Important:** Lack of sleep can affect your ability to make clear decisions, manage emotions, and maintain your overall health. Proper rest is essential for coping with the demands of divorce planning.
- **Experts Who Can Help:** Sleep specialists or therapists who focus on sleep hygiene.
- **How to Ask for Help:** Consult a sleep expert and share, "I've been struggling to get quality sleep due to stress. Can you help me create a plan or provide tips to improve my sleep habits during this difficult time?"

4 Essential Considerations for Your Mental Health When Considering Divorce

Seek Professional Emotional Support

- **What It Is:** Engaging with a therapist or counselor to process emotions, gain clarity, and develop coping mechanisms.
- **Why It's Important:** Considering divorce can bring up feelings of grief, anger, guilt, or fear. A mental health professional can provide a safe space to explore these emotions and help you make decisions with a clear mind.
- **Experts Who Can Help:** Licensed therapists, psychologists, or counselors specializing in life transitions or family dynamics.
- **How to Ask for Help:** Find a therapist and ask, "I'm contemplating divorce and feeling a mix of emotions. Can you help me process these feelings and build a plan to approach the situation in a healthy way?"

Understand the Impact on Your Mental Health

- **What It Is:** Assessing how the potential divorce may affect your mental well-being, including any pre-existing conditions such as anxiety or depression.
- **Why It's Important:** Knowing your mental health baseline helps you identify warning signs of increased emotional distress and allows you to seek support proactively.
- **Experts Who Can Help:** Psychiatrists, therapists, or mental health specialists.
- **How to Ask for Help:** Schedule a consultation and explain, "I'm facing a significant life decision and want to ensure my mental health remains stable. Are there ways to monitor and support my emotional well-being during this process?"

Develop Stress-Management Strategies

- **What It Is:** Implementing practices to reduce and manage stress, such as mindfulness, meditation, or relaxation techniques.
- **Why It's Important:** Chronic stress can cloud judgment and negatively impact both your mental and physical health. Learning to manage stress ensures you stay focused and balanced while navigating potential challenges.
- **Experts Who Can Help:** Mindfulness coaches, meditation teachers, or therapists skilled in cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT).
- **How to Ask for Help:** Consult a mindfulness coach or therapist and say, "I'm experiencing heightened stress while considering a major life decision. Can you recommend practices or tools to help me stay grounded?"

Create a Support System

- **What It Is:** Building a network of trusted individuals who can provide emotional encouragement and practical advice.
- **Why It's Important:** Feeling isolated during this time can worsen emotional strain. A strong support system provides reassurance, perspective, and a reminder that you're not alone.
- **Experts Who Can Help:** Support groups, divorce coaches, or peer support networks.
- **How to Ask for Help:** Join a support group or speak with a divorce coach and share, "I'm considering divorce and want to connect with others who understand this experience. Can you guide me in finding community support and practical resources?"

4 Essential Considerations for Your Self-Care When Considering Divorce

Establish a Daily Self-Care Routine

- **What It Is:** Creating a daily practice that includes activities like exercise, journaling, or spending time on hobbies that bring you joy.
- **Why It's Important:** Divorce-related stress can be overwhelming, and consistent self-care helps you stay centered, energized, and emotionally balanced.
- **Experts Who Can Help:** Wellness coaches, personal trainers, or self-care mentors.
- **How to Ask for Help:** Reach out to a wellness coach and say, "I'm navigating a challenging period and need help creating a self-care routine that supports my physical and emotional well-being. Can you guide me?"

Set Healthy Boundaries

- **What It Is:** Defining limits with your spouse, friends, and family to protect your emotional space and prioritize your needs.
- **Why It's Important:** Boundaries help you conserve emotional energy and reduce conflict, which is crucial while contemplating divorce.
- **Experts Who Can Help:** Life coaches, therapists, or boundary-setting specialists.
- **How to Ask for Help:** Speak with a therapist and say, "I'm in a transitional period and need guidance on setting boundaries to manage stress and focus on myself. Can you help me create a plan?"

Prioritize Rest and Sleep

- **What It Is:** Ensuring you get quality sleep to allow your body and mind to recharge.
- **Why It's Important:** Poor sleep can exacerbate stress, impair decision-making, and take a toll on your physical and mental health during an already taxing time.
- **Experts Who Can Help:** Sleep coaches, therapists specializing in sleep, or medical professionals.
- **How to Ask for Help:** Consult a sleep coach and say, "Stress is impacting my sleep, and I want to develop healthier habits to rest better. What steps can I take to improve my sleep quality?"

Engage in Activities That Bring You Joy

- **What It Is:** Allocating time for hobbies, creative outlets, or relaxing activities that uplift your spirit.
- **Why It's Important:** Finding joy amidst uncertainty can boost your mood, build resilience, and remind you of the positive aspects of your life.
- **Experts Who Can Help:** Art therapists, hobby instructors, or mindfulness practitioners.
- **How to Ask for Help:** Contact an instructor or therapist and ask, "I want to reconnect with activities that bring me happiness during this challenging time. Can you suggest ways to incorporate creativity or mindfulness into my routine?"



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Build your team with us.

Divorce can feel like a **thousand** decisions made under pressure.
Legal. Financial. Emotional. Logistical.

That's not something one person should carry.

The Fresh Starts Expert Guide connects you with vetted professionals who specialize in divorce and life transitions — people who understand both the paperwork and the emotional weight behind it.

This Isn't Just A Directory. It's A Support System.



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Every expert is chosen for clarity, compassion, and credibility.

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Fresh Starts Registry. This is what support should feel like.

Hey Olivia:

"I'm Watching Myself Sink Into Debt in Real Time"

"Hey Olivia, I'm terrified and I don't know who else to ask. I earn good money — I've always been financially responsible — but my ex is taking everything through the courts and he's already told me that's his plan. He comes from family wealth so none of this will hurt him the way it's hurting me. I've gone from feeling financially secure to watching myself sink into serious debt in real time. Are there things people do to prepare that nobody talks about? I feel like I should be doing something but I'm so overwhelmed I can't think straight."

First: what you're feeling is a completely rational response to a genuinely destabilizing situation. Financial fear in a high-conflict divorce isn't anxiety being overdramatic. It's your nervous system correctly registering a real threat. And the fact that you're asking how do I prepare? instead of going numb? That instinct is one of your most important assets right now.

When one party has family wealth and the other doesn't, it creates a real power imbalance in litigation. He can afford to drag this out. That's a documented tactic — financial abuse through the legal system. This isn't happening because you did something wrong. You're in an uneven fight, and the goal is to protect what you can.


Practical preparation is real, and there's no shame in it. Buy ahead for the kids gradually — next-size clothing, school supplies, seasonal basics. Think of it as building a buffer. Use your FSA if you have one. Stock a basic medicine cabinet.

Protect your financial information now. Pull your credit report. Screenshot statements for every account. Save records somewhere he cannot access. If joint accounts are being depleted, ask your attorney about a status quo order — you have a right to protect marital assets.

If you don't have a personal account in your name only, open one today. This isn't hiding money. It's establishing your own financial identity. And consider a Certified Divorce Financial Analyst (CDFA) — they understand the long-term math of settlements in ways attorneys sometimes don't. You earn good money. That income, that capability, that credit history — it's yours. The goal isn't to come out where you were. The goal is to come out standing.

One thing. Just one. Start there.



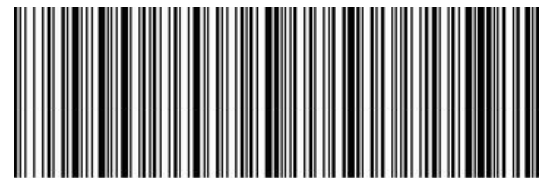


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