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VOL. 02

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**

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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.

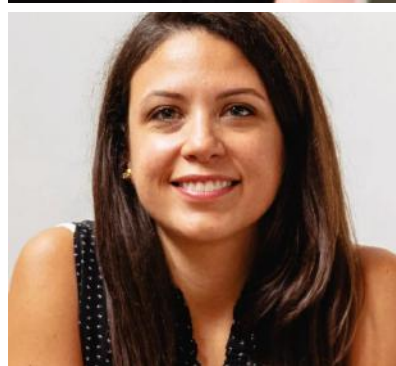
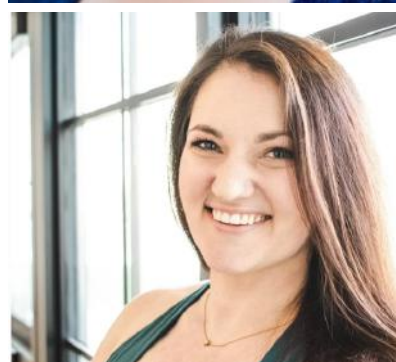
Every divorce is unique. Readers are encouraged to seek individualized advice from professionals who understand their specific circumstances.

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.

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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.

February Events from Fresh Starts

Fresh Starts Registry presents
**Divorce & Money: What You Must
Do Financially Before You File**



with
Donna Cates,
Certified Divorce
Financial Analyst

**February 10 at
2:00 PM EST**

Donna Cates, Certified Divorce Financial Analyst is joining Fresh Starts to host: Divorce & Money: What You Must Do Financially Before You File on Tuesday, February 10 at 2:00 PM EST. Learn more and sign up [HERE!](#)

Feb 10, 2026

Fresh Starts Registry presents
**When Your Friend Says “I’m Thinking
About Divorce” What to Say, What Not
to Say, and When to Just Listen**



with
Erin Snow,
Professional Listener

**February 11 at
08:00 PM EST**

Erin Snow, Professional Listener is joining Fresh Starts to host: When Your Friend Says “I’m Thinking About Divorce” What to Say, What Not to Say, and When to Just Listen on Wednesday, February 11 at 8:00 PM EST. Learn more and sign up [HERE!](#)

Feb 11, 2026

Fresh Starts Registry presents
**Loving an Addict Without
Losing Yourself**



with
Meredith Beardmore,
Therapist

**February 17 at
08:00 PM EST**

Meredith Beardmore of Mend with Mere is joining Fresh Starts Registry to host: Loving an Addict Without Losing Yourself, February 17 at 8:00 PM EST. Learn more and sign up [HERE!](#)

Feb 17, 2026

Fresh Starts Registry presents
**Your Divorce
Values Compass**



with
Lisa Lisser,
Divorce Coach

**February 25 at
12:30 PM**

Lisa Lisser, Divorce Coach is joining Fresh Starts to host: Your Divorce Values Compass on Wednesday, February 25 at 12:30 PM EST. Learn more and sign up [HERE!](#)

Feb 25, 2026

A Letter from Our Editor

Genevieve “Jenny” Dreizen

February Is a Good Month to Come Back to Yourself

February can feel like a month that’s constantly clearing its throat.

It’s short. It’s loud. It’s full of hearts and pink and messaging that assumes you have a “we” to celebrate. And if you’re in the middle of a divorce—or the tender, weird aftershocks of one—it can make you feel like you’re watching life through a window: everyone else paired up, everyone else certain, everyone else held.

So here’s what I want to offer you this month: you don’t have to “do” February the way the world tells you to.

You can make February about love, yes—but not the performative kind. Not the kind that’s measured in reservations or roses or proving you’re okay. I mean the quiet, private love. The “I’m learning myself again” love. The kind that isn’t a grand gesture so much as a daily practice of returning to your own life.

This is the month to investigate what you love.

Not in a self-help-y, pressure-filled way. In a curious way. Like you’re meeting yourself again after years of being in a role—partner, spouse, peacekeeper, manager of moods, keeper of the calendar—and you’re finally asking: what actually lights me up? What makes me feel like me? What’s mine?

Because divorce can take up so much emotional square footage. It crowds out your taste. It shrinks your appetite—for food, for music, for pleasure, for play, for beauty. Sometimes you don’t even realize you’ve been living at half-volume until you hear yourself laugh and think, Oh. There you are.

So let’s do something different. Let’s make February a field study.



photo by Terrie Alfieri

A few gentle investigations to try this month

1

Follow the “tiny yes.” Not the big dramatic changes. The small ones. The I want to sit by the window with my coffee yes. The I want the good sheets on the bed even if no one’s coming over yes. The I’m going to listen to the song I love on repeat in the car yes. Your life doesn’t rebuild itself all at once. It rebuilds itself in hundreds of small permissions.

2

Make a “joy inventory,” not a to-do list. Grab a note in your phone and start a running list called Things That Make Me Feel Like Myself. Add anything: the smell of laundry warm from the dryer, walking with an audiobook, a certain lipstick, the first bite of salty popcorn, clean counters, dancing in the kitchen, a hot shower with the door locked. This isn’t frivolous. This is data. This is you collecting evidence that your nervous system can still feel safe and good.

3

Date your own tastes. When you’ve spent years accommodating someone else’s preferences —TV, restaurants, weekend plans, social rhythms— it can be surprisingly hard to know what you genuinely like. So try: one movie that’s your taste, one playlist that’s your mood, one meal that’s exactly what you want, one little purchase that makes your home feel more like yours (a candle, a plant, a new mug—small is perfect).

4

Practice love as care, not as performance.

In February, the world sells love as a photo op. But real love is often boring in the best way. Real love is: booking the appointment, drinking water, putting the paperwork in one folder, taking the walk, going to bed earlier, texting the friend back, asking for help, choosing the calmer choice even when you’re tempted to spiral.

5

Find joy that doesn’t require a witness.

This is a big one, especially after divorce: doing something just because it feels good, not because it proves anything to anyone. Joy that doesn’t need to be posted. Joy that doesn’t need to be explained. Joy that you’re allowed to have even if things are still messy.

If Valentine’s Day stings —

Let it sting. You’re human.

But please don’t confuse a tender day with a verdict on your worth. Valentine’s Day is not a report card. It’s a cultural moment—one that often ignores the full reality of love, partnership, caregiving, loneliness, grief, relief, and rebuilding.

If you need a plan for that day, here are a few options that count as love:

- Spend the evening doing something that makes your body feel safe (bath, early bed, comfort show, long walk).
- Make a “future me” gift: clean your space a bit, prep a cozy breakfast, set out tomorrow’s outfit, pay one bill, organize one drawer.
- Have a “love date” with a friend—no romance required for connection.
- Or opt out entirely. It’s allowed. You can treat it like any other Tuesday.

A reminder from me to you: You’re not behind.

You’re not failing at love because your marriage ended. You’re not “too much” because you want tenderness and consistency and care. You’re not asking for something unreasonable because you want a life that feels lighter in your body.

This month, let love be less about being chosen by someone else—and more about choosing yourself in small, believable ways.

Investigate what you love. Notice what brings you back to yourself. Follow the joy that feels quiet and honest. Build a life that doesn’t require you to shrink to fit it.

That is romance, too. That is devotion. That is a fresh start.

With love (the real kind),

Jenny

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

Review Those Beneficiary Designations — Especially After Major Life Changes



by Bridget Borel, Financial Planner

[Learn more about Clairwell Financial Planning](#)

When it comes to financial planning, few details carry as much weight as your beneficiary designations. They may seem like just another form you filled out years ago when opening an account or signing up for life insurance, but these choices determine where some of your most important assets will go. What many people don't realize is that beneficiary designations override your will or estate plan. That means, no matter what your will says, the person listed on your retirement account or insurance policy will inherit those funds. For that reason alone, it's essential to keep your designations current and intentional.

Review and Refresh

Life is never static, and your beneficiary list shouldn't be either. Major milestones—marriage, divorce, the birth of children or grandchildren, even a career change—can shift your priorities and your wishes. Left unchecked, outdated designations can cause assets to flow to someone you no longer intend, create unnecessary tax burdens, or trigger family conflict. Reviewing these choices every few years, or whenever there's a significant life change, ensures that your financial plan reflects the life you're actually living.

Divorce, in particular, is one of the most common times when beneficiary designations need attention. Many assume that a divorce automatically removes an ex-spouse from all accounts, but the reality is more complicated. Some states revoke those designations automatically; others, including Maryland, do not. In many cases, the responsibility falls on you to make the change. Updating each account separately is essential, since designations on retirement plans, insurance policies, and annuities don't change just because you updated your will.

Overlooking these details could mean that assets end up in the wrong hands—or tangled in probate.

When Keeping Your Ex as Beneficiary Makes Sense

Yet it's worth noting that there are situations where keeping a former spouse as a beneficiary may actually make sense. If you share minor children, for example, naming your ex-spouse as a beneficiary can simplify how resources flow to support them, especially if that spouse is their guardian. In blended family situations, or when financial responsibilities continue even after divorce, you might find that retaining a former spouse in some capacity provides stability and predictability. Sometimes this means leaving them as a primary beneficiary, though more often it may involve shifting their role to a contingent beneficiary or creating clear rules through a trust. The key is to make these decisions intentionally, not by default.

Keep it Simple

Reviewing beneficiary designations is a regular task for our financial planning clients at Clairwell, but you can do this on your own even if your advisor doesn't. The process of updating your beneficiaries doesn't need to feel overwhelming. Start by making a list of your accounts—retirement plans, life insurance, annuities, even health savings accounts. Pull up your current designations and decide whether they still reflect your wishes. Once you've clarified your intentions, contact the custodians or insurers directly to file updated forms. It's also wise to let the trusted people in your life—such as your executor or financial advisor—know where to find this information, even if you don't share the details. And just as you revisit your financial plan periodically, commit to reviewing your designations every few years or after major life events.

Ensure Your Assets Pass on as You Intend

Beneficiary designations are one of the simplest yet most powerful tools in your financial plan. They give you direct control over who receives certain assets and can spare your loved ones the delay and complications of probate. But like so much in life, they require care and attention over time. Whether you are revising them after a divorce, considering the needs of children, or simply ensuring your intentions remain clear, the goal is the same: to make sure your wealth supports the people and priorities that matter most to you. If you'd like guidance in reviewing or updating your beneficiary plan, especially in the context of complex family dynamics, we're here to help you think it through and put it into place with confidence.



[Get Your Divorced AF Hat](#)

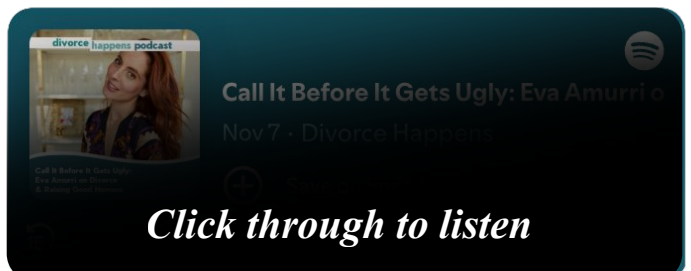
Call It Before It Gets Ugly: Eva Amurri on Divorce & Raising Good Humans

You don't plan for the moment you realize the marriage is over—you arrive there, breath held, heart loud, and somehow still responsible for packing lunches and paying bills. In this intimate conversation, actress, creator, and OG blogger Eva Amurri—now a remarried mom of three and the force behind The Westport Project—joins Olivia to talk about divorce recovery as a living practice: calling it before it gets ugly, learning to communicate in therapy, and reinventing when the ground keeps moving. What follows is a story about emotional turmoil that becomes usable wisdom.

Drawing on her public divorce and collaborative co-parenting, Eva shares the choices that protected her kids and her sanity: mediate when you can, center the children in every decision, and build financial independence—even if it starts as \$5 a day from a tiny side hustle. She talks candidly about losing friends during separation, the sting of holidays, and the discipline of keeping your words clean in front of the kids. It's practical and tender: co-parenting tips, boundaries, and the mindset shifts that turn survival mode into resilience.



**Call It Before It Gets Ugly:
Eva Amurri on Divorce
& Raising Good Humans**



EXPERT FEATURE

Taylor Beck

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 Taylor Beck, a Divorce Coach, whose work helps clients find clarity, strength, and a true fresh start.

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

Hi, I'm Taylor and I am an ADR Certified Divorce Coach. After my own divorce happened before turning 30, my passion for helping women navigate a tumultuous time exploded. I wanted to represent what I wish I would have seen more of- helping women stop settling sooner and choosing themselves.

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

While huge life transitions such as divorce can be overwhelming, I also wanted to show that there is truly SO much power in the pivot. Starting over, seeing what is in store for them in their next chapter is beautiful. To be a part of or the only support system someone might have while they navigate the chaos is honestly something I cherish. To watch someone go from defeated to empowered is absolutely magical.

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

My speciality is keeping it honest and real, while still maintaining empathy and deploying strategy. Divorce is an emotional roller coaster, but if you can keep the feelings in check it makes the chaos fall to the wayside. Easier said than done, this I know first hand. My support system has checks and balances, with weekly or bi-weekly virtual calls depending on the client, regular messaging in between sessions, and active resources customized to the situation to keep clients on track. It's on my clients to put forward the actual work, every single day. But I am truly by their side every step of the way cheering them on and giving them space to do the damn thing.

To watch someone go from defeated to empowered is absolutely magical.



Photo by Taylor Beck



What makes your approach to working with clients unique?

Several things. For starters, we are in an unregulated industry where quite literally anyone can slap divorce coach after their name and enter the space.

There is no shortage of options in today's world for clients to choose from, and I want to be so clear - I am NOT for everyone. I'm not your therapist, I'm here to help you push through to the best version of yourself that exists despite shitty circumstances. I'm not the type to nod along, I show up alongside my clients with where they are at in real time. I only work with individuals where there is an actual connection, so they can truly understand I have their back as they navigate the chaotic waters and everything divorce encompasses.

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

I'm probably older than you think I am, for starter. I've lived in other countries and states, navigated my divorce before I turned 30 with a child in tow. Ended up a full time single mom quite literally over night, and have been in and out of the court room for years with my ex. Life doesn't stop - when you overcome one step, there's usually another following. But my mentality has shifted everything and that's one of the reasons I am so incredibly passionate about supporting other women to the other side.

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

Where to begin? My personal divorce story was fueled by overwhelm, anxiety and constantly picturing worst case scenarios. I allowed my ex husband to ruin so many experiences for me, such as purchasing my first home for myself and my son, simply because I did not have the tools to regulate and tune out the noise. Even in what followed for

additional court situations I rushed situations that should have been more intentional, which is why I stress strategy to all my clients and work with them on not making any of the same mistakes I made.

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

With two little kids, it's typically post bedtime routine that I can work on resetting. I do so by taking a hot shower and ending my day with reading. Typically it's self improvement or other entrepreneurial type reads, but sometimes it's fiction and fun to really just decompress after the day and immerse myself in another world. When you can get out of a foggy headspace after a long day, that's key for me in order to unwind and reset for the next day.

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

Bold, powerful & strategic

What does "fresh start" mean to you personally?

When you get a divorce, you are closing the door on a version of yourself and a life that will no longer exist as you knew it. There are stages in grief of course for this, but a "fresh start" is truly opening the door for your future. Allowing in all the good to wash over what you're calling in, making way for you to step into everything you deserve and want in life.

Taylor Beck, Divorce Coach

Able to work with clients in all 50 states

Taylor Beck

What to Do If Your Spouse Is Draining Accounts During Divorce

A question we often hear is: “What can I do if my spouse is draining our accounts during divorce? The summons says they aren’t supposed to, but it keeps happening.”

If you’re a stay-at-home parent or financially dependent on your spouse, this situation can feel terrifying. Money isn’t just numbers—it’s stability, safety, and the foundation of your fresh start. Let’s walk through what this means and what you can do.

Dissipation of Assets Explained

When a divorce is filed, most courts issue what’s called an automatic temporary restraining order (ATRO) or similar rule. This order prevents either spouse from dissipating, hiding, or liquidating marital assets. In other words, neither of you is supposed to spend down accounts in ways that harm the other.

If your spouse is ignoring this and draining money, it may not always rise to the level of an emergency order—but it is still serious and something you can bring to the court’s attention.

Why This Matters

Draining accounts can directly impact custody, support, and property division later. Judges don’t look kindly on spouses who play financial games, and documented dissipation can influence the outcome of the case.

What You Can Do Now

- Keep detailed records. Save statements, screenshots, and receipts that show when and how accounts are being drained.
- Tell your attorney immediately. Even if it doesn’t meet the criteria for an emergency order, your lawyer can bring it up at the next hearing or file a motion later.
- Ask about discovery. This legal process allows your attorney to formally request financial records, which can uncover hidden or misused funds.
- Stay calm but firm. The temptation is to panic or retaliate, but documenting and addressing it through the court is the most effective path.

A Gentle Reminder

If you feel powerless right now, you’re not alone. Financial abuse and manipulation are unfortunately common in divorce, especially when one spouse has been the primary earner. Please remember: the court takes this seriously, even if it doesn’t feel immediate. You are not overreacting by raising these concerns—you are protecting your future.

At Fresh Starts, we have divorce attorneys and financial experts in our Expert Guide who can help you navigate situations like this, from reviewing bank records to creating a sustainable financial plan for your new chapter.

If you’re just beginning this journey, download our free ebook, [What to Consider When You’re Considering Divorce](#). It includes checklists, scripts, and compassionate advice to help you protect your stability from day one.

Your fresh start isn’t built on fear—it’s built on knowledge, support, and protecting what’s yours.

My Spouse Moved Out: How Do I Make This Place Feel Like Home Again?



by Holly Martins founder of Holly Martins, Real Estate Agent

[Learn more about Holly Martins, NJ Real Estate](#)

Creating a sanctuary at home is about more than just aesthetics; it's about crafting a space that nurtures your mind, body, and soul. Here are five transformative ideas to make your house feel like the paradise you've always dreamed of.

Personalized Décor

Your home should be a reflection of your personality and tastes. Personalizing your décor with meaningful items can instantly make your space feel more like you. Here's how:

Incorporate Sentimental Items

Display cherished mementos, like family photos, travel souvenirs, or heirlooms, to evoke happy memories and a sense of belonging.

Choose Colors Wisely

Select a color palette that resonates with YOU. Soft, calming colors like blues and greens can create a tranquil atmosphere, while vibrant hues like reds and oranges can energize a space.

Art and Crafts

Invest in artwork or create your own. Art can be a powerful way to express your individuality and bring life to your walls.

Create Comfortable and Functional Spaces

Comfort and functionality are key to making your home feel like a haven. Consider the following tips to enhance these aspects:

Invest in Quality Furniture

Choose furniture that is both comfortable and functional. A cozy couch, a supportive bed, and ergonomic chairs can make a world of difference in your everyday comfort.

Designate Zones

Organize your home into distinct zones for different activities. Have a relaxing reading nook, a productive home office, and a serene bedroom to ensure each area serves its purpose effectively.

Maximize Natural Light

Use light, airy curtains or blinds to let in natural light. Sunlight can significantly boost your mood and make your home feel more open and inviting.

Incorporate Nature

Bringing elements of nature indoors can enhance your home's ambiance and promote a sense of tranquility. Here's how to do it:

→ Indoor Plants

Houseplants like succulents, ferns, and peace lilies not only purify the air but also add a touch of greenery, making your home feel alive and vibrant.

→ Natural Materials

Use natural materials such as wood, stone, and bamboo in your décor. These elements can add warmth and texture to your space.

→ Water Features

Consider incorporating a small indoor fountain or aquarium. The sound of flowing water can be incredibly soothing and enhance the peacefulness of your home.

Create a Spa-like Bathroom

Transform your bathroom into a spa-like retreat to unwind and rejuvenate. Here's how you can achieve this:

→ Upgrade Fixtures

Install a rain shower head, a deep soaking tub, or a steam shower to create a luxurious bathing experience.

→ Soft Textiles

Use plush towels, bathrobes, and rugs to add comfort. Opt for materials like Egyptian cotton or bamboo for an extra touch of luxury. Heck, you might decide to get a whole new bed (which is what I did) to reclaim it as your own.

→ Ambient Lighting

Incorporate dimmable lights and scented candles to create a calming atmosphere. Soft lighting can help you relax after a long day.

Technology for Convenience and Comfort

Smart home technology can significantly enhance your comfort and convenience. Here are a few tech upgrades to consider:

→ Smart Thermostat

A smart thermostat can help maintain the perfect temperature in your home, ensuring comfort year-round while saving on energy bills.

→ Voice-Controlled Assistants

Devices like Amazon Alexa or Google Home can control lights, play music, and even manage your calendar, making daily tasks easier and your home more responsive to your needs.

→ Home Security Systems

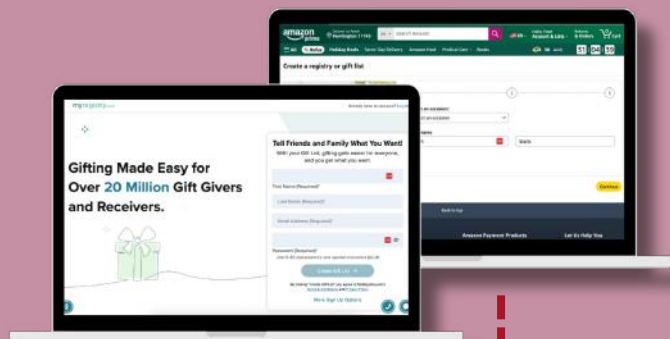
Invest in a comprehensive home security system. Feeling safe and secure in your home is paramount to creating a peaceful sanctuary!!

By personalizing your décor, creating comfortable and functional spaces, incorporating nature, designing a spa-like bathroom, and integrating smart technology, you can transform your house into a true paradise. Your home is your haven, and with these thoughtful touches, it can be a place where you feel truly at peace and content.

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.

Get supported by your community during your time of rebuild!



Definitely NOT the Registry Fairy

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.

4

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.

5

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.

6

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.

7

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.

8

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.

9

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.

10

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!



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

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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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.

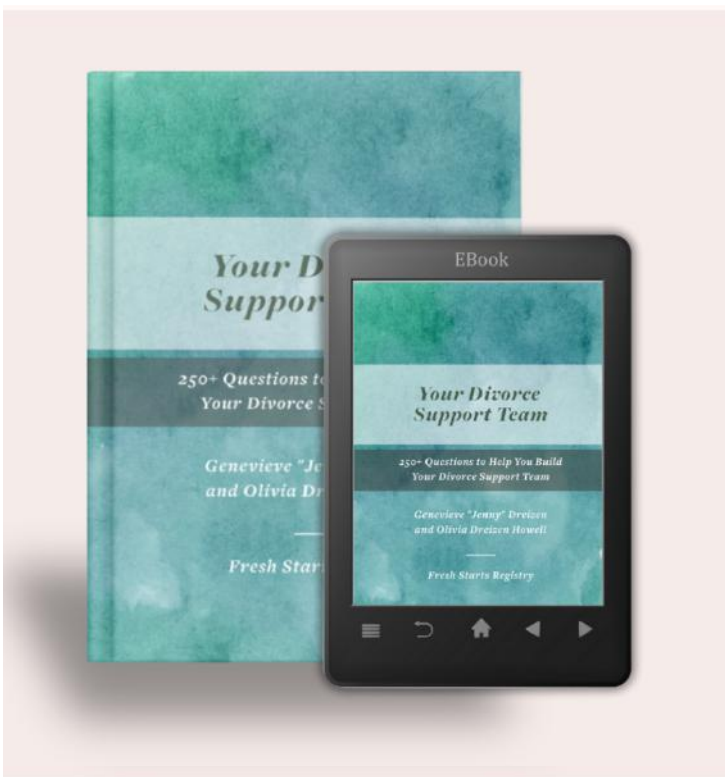
In this 15-minute conversation with Fresh Starts co-founder Olivia Howell, you'll get clarity on what you actually need, which professionals can help, and how to move through your next decisions with confidence — not chaos. No judgment. No pressure. Just clear direction and compassionate support.

We help you:

- Understand your first steps
- Find the right experts for your situation
- Build a personalized “hype team”
- Feel less alone in the process
- Your fresh start begins with one conversation

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Fresh Starts — Support You Can Feel.



Your Divorce Support Team: 250+ Questions to Help You Build Your Divorce Support Team

Your Divorce Support Team is your go-to guide for navigating divorce with clarity and confidence. Packed with 250+ essential questions and expert insights, this resource empowers you to build the right support team, protect your finances, and prioritize your emotional well-being during every step of the process.

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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 | |

Feeling a little lost navigating the next steps?

**Book your free 15-minute Divorce Resource
Consult at divorceresourceconsult.com**

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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Ask Jenny a Question



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.

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

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

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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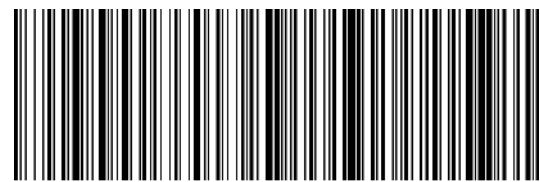


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