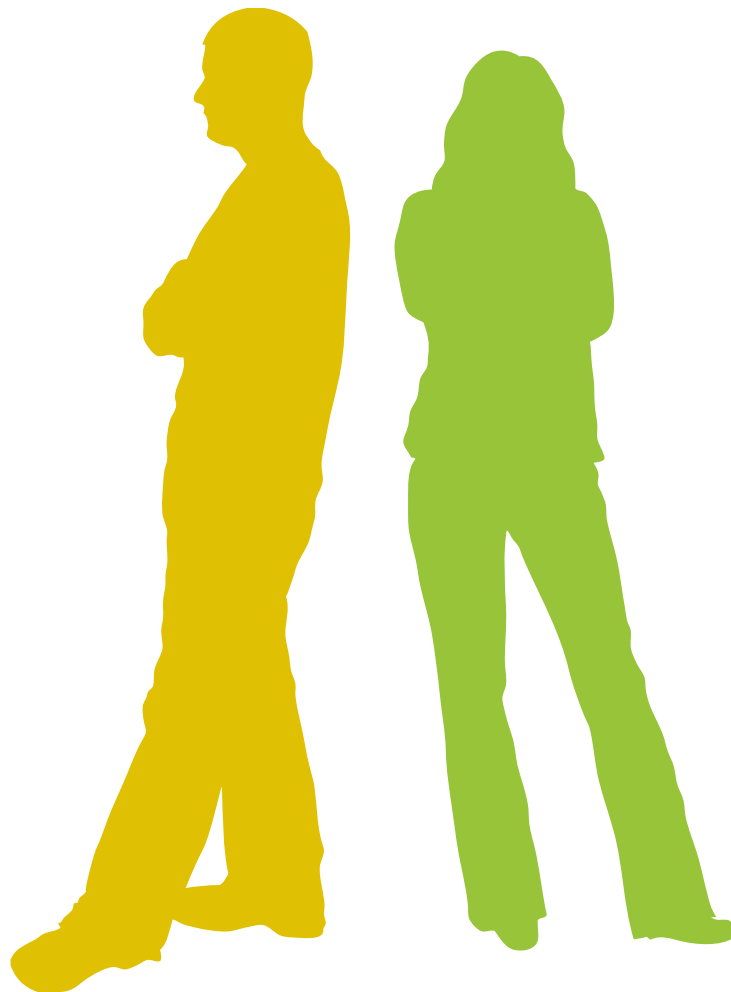


Divorce: A Problem to Solve

Not A War to Win



Collaborative Divorce — a better option

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Getting A Divorce

Why it's hard

by Mike Blount



Getting a divorce is hard. It's mentally and physically taxing. You can't sleep. You can't eat. You are consumed with thoughts of how life is going to be moving forward, yet you are stuck in the present, needing to sort through it all — thinking about what happens to the kids, the house, the cars, the pets. You feel overwhelmed, and it's hard. Or, maybe you are just so done.

At a time when you may not want to deal with your spouse and talk about the future, you know that is exactly what has to happen. But often, there are still a lot of negative feelings involved. In some cases, one of the people in the relationship was blindsided by the decision. Maybe you have been fighting for a long time. Maybe you have talked for hours and gotten nowhere, and you feel that you will never agree on anything ever again. This is also the time people in a relationship are the most vulnerable, and being considerate of your spouse's feelings and needs is not on your radar.

Moving on from any broken relationship can be difficult, but sometimes it is even harder to do that when the divorce process itself aggravates the pain.

You need to give yourself time to get your bearings, and the more contentious the process of divorce is, the harder it will be to get business taken care of and move on. Moving on from any broken relationship can be difficult, but sometimes it is even harder to do that when the divorce process itself aggravates the pain. You're constantly being forced to feel the hurt, the fear and the frustration. You know how to push each other's buttons and you get nowhere. You need help.

If you have children, you need to remind yourself that the children are what's important. Your dignity is important. Your emotional well-being is important. And, you can't move forward if you are stuck fighting a war with your spouse.

And you can't just walk away.

You're going to have to learn a new way to communicate and interact if you are going to work out things like the care of your children, how to pay bills and how to divide your things. You're facing so many life-changing decisions and you need help.

You *can* move forward in a positive, collaborative way with a mutual goal of finding a resolution that meets everyone's needs.

Common Questions about Collaborative Divorce

How much does Collaborative Divorce cost?

It's hard to predict how much any divorce will cost. Dealing with complicated legal issues can increase the cost, but a common reason that a divorce gets very expensive is because strong emotions lead to conflict and a lack of trust. When you have Collaborative Divorce, you can trust that no one will be a party to secrets or game-playing and that saves you money. Collaborative Divorce helps people manage the emotions that come up in a divorce, and communicate effectively — that reduces conflict and that saves you money.

Does Collaborative Divorce get finished faster than going to court?

In Collaborative Divorce you control the pace of the process, unlike in a conventional divorce when you have to fit in to the court's schedule, which often involves continuances when the court schedule is overcrowded. In Collaborative Divorce, if you need time, you get the time you need. If you are motivated to get things done quickly, you can move through the process much more quickly than you would in court.

Why do we need divorce coaches?

Ending a marriage involves a difficult mix of personal and businesslike issues. When children are involved, the emotional impact is often much stronger. When you're in court, you are expected to take care of business — showing emotion in court can work against you so, if you're lucky, your lawyer might try to help you control your emotions, even though a lawyer is not really trained to do this and charges a high hourly rate. In Collaborative Divorce, you have a coach who is properly trained to help you recognize and address the emotions that naturally arise so they don't get in the way of moving forward to reach agreements. Plus the coach's hourly rate is typically much lower than that of your lawyer. When each person has a coach, you have an effective team that helps you move through the process in a productive way.

Why do we need a financial specialist?

Using one neutral financial specialist is the most effective way to collect and organize your financial information. The financial specialist has the training and experience to guide you through this part of your divorce with skills that are not normally a part of a lawyer's training, at a substantially lower hourly rate. The neutral financial specialist is particularly qualified to help you and your spouse develop a realistic plan for your separate financial futures.

Collaborative Divorce

How to divorce without going to court

by Mike Blount

The Sacramento Collaborative Practice Group, an association of independent professionals, provides an alternative to a conventional divorce that allows you and your spouse to resolve your issues respectfully. Instead of each person trying to navigate the divorce alone and being unsure of where to turn for support, or having an attorney who is trained to argue, there is a team of skilled professionals ready to help manage the many complicated aspects of divorce. From legal issues, concerns about the children, property and financial questions, to the emotional well-being of both people — the team is there to help you and your spouse take control of your divorce process and give you each the opportunity to move through to a resolution.

Divorce is a life-changing event. Members of the Sacramento Collaborative Practice Group can help you, your spouse and your family find a compassionate ending and a healthy new beginning. By taking part in Collaborative Divorce, you and your spouse can move forward in the most positive way possible — laying the groundwork for and planning your new lives.

As part of Collaborative Divorce, you both commit to treat each other with mutual respect. This is a fundamental aspect of this process and is based on three principles — a pledge to resolve issues without going to court, a complete and open exchange of information and a solution that takes into account the interests of both of you and your children. Collaborative Divorce ground rules help you move forward and assure you and

your spouse focus on your mutual interests, make discussions more productive and pave the way to reach agreements.

Open communication is also key to Collaborative Divorce. If communication breaks down, so does the ability to reach agreements. Even if the decision to divorce is mutual, communication can be strained at the end of a marriage. That's why it's important to find a way to keep the lines of communication open and work through your differences face-to-face. This is supported through meetings between you, your spouse and members of your collaborative team.

The difference between a conventional divorce and Collaborative Divorce is that both you and your spouse pledge to reach an agreement without going to court. In a traditional divorce, you may see your spouse as the enemy and the divorce as a battle you have to win with a judge deciding the outcome. But in Collaborative Divorce, you and your spouse make the decisions yourselves, rather than giving that responsibility to a judge. You agree to work out your differences together, with the help of your collaborative team. And to achieve this, all parties consent in writing to be part of a team that works together to avoid court and reach resolutions both of you can live with.

Finding an agreement that works for everyone is crucial to Collaborative Divorce. Reaching the decision to divorce is only the beginning and the collaborative process is designed to help you and your spouse reach an agreement with both of your interests in mind. It is also designed to protect

the well-being of your children. It is important to resolve your issues based on mutual agreement in a workable environment. Instead of focusing on your grievances, the team will help you and your spouse find common ground again and help each of you move forward with your new lives.

Divorce is a life-changing event. Members of the Sacramento Collaborative Practice Group can help you, your spouse and your family find a compassionate ending and a healthy new beginning.

Finally, Collaborative Divorce focuses on both of your futures. While a divorce marks the end of your marriage, it doesn't mean that you have to sever all ties and your relationship. When children are involved, both parents must work together to make sure their children are taken care of and have what they need.

Collaborative Divorce helps you and your spouse continue to communicate after the divorce by encouraging respectful and meaningful interactions throughout the divorce process.



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Finding The Right Help

A man finds the collaborative process easier than traditional divorce

by Beatrice Hogg

After 15 years of marriage and two children, John* and his wife Donna* had grown apart. Donna suggested that they look into getting a Collaborative Divorce. The 40-year-old considered mediation, but then discovered that Collaborative Divorce was a better process for them. Not only did he have an attorney, but also a divorce coach, a neutral financial specialist and a neutral child specialist. Having those professionals working side by side with him helped him gain perspective and learn empathy, and that made life after divorce better for the children.

John was surprised by how helpful the child specialist was to his family. "I was extremely skeptical," he remembers. "But it was enlightening. I learned the reality of what was going on with my children." The child specialist met with his children, ensuring that their opinions and needs were considered.

"Each party's thoughts and opinions were considered and valued."

Instead of an adversarial process, Collaborative Divorce helps both parties remain civil and maintain respect. Everyone on the team was a seasoned professional. The attorneys "didn't go for the jugular."

He says Collaborative Divorce was better for him and his wife because they "didn't want to trash each other in front of the children." Initially, he says, Collaborative Divorce may seem to be more expensive, but it is less costly in the long run, both financially and emotionally. John's issues were resolved quickly, helping them get back to living their lives. In John's case, the process took about three months.

For awhile, the parties and their teams met weekly. Other times, they met at three-week intervals, depending on what was needed. Using Collaborative Divorce, clients receive guidance on



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how to control their emotions. "[The team] helps you to understand the reality," he says. "My divorce coach was amazing."

John says he would recommend Collaborative Divorce to anyone. "Follow this process. Anyone who doesn't is just hurting themselves."

He feels that it is the only process where both sides are encouraged to understand each other's needs and interests. During the process, sometimes Donna would make a statement that his coach agreed with, and his coach would help him understand the reasoning behind her statement

— the reverse also happened. The team helped to "reopen those doors to let the information in." Each party's thoughts and opinions were considered and valued.

John feels that even though it is hard to go through a divorce, the Collaborative Divorce team made it easier. He says, "[It's] like non-invasive surgery. It's not pleasant, but it is as pleasant as it can be."

**Indicates name has been changed to protect client's privacy.*

Can my privacy be protected?

In Collaborative Divorce, you have the power to arrange your meetings to suit your schedule, and these meetings are not in an open public courtroom. When conflict escalates in a divorce, a great deal of very personal information can end up in the court file. When emotions and conflict are managed effectively, your issues are addressed in a private setting. When a couple is working collaboratively, they can work together to keep as much of their business private as possible.

Can we use Collaborative Divorce if we have children?

Collaborative Divorce is specially tailored to serve the needs of children. It is well established that conflict between parents poses the greatest risk of emotional harm to children in a divorce. Collaborative Divorce is designed to manage conflict, so children's needs are met and agreements are reached. A collaborative child specialist gives a voice to the child in the divorce process — something that rarely happens in the courtroom.

Working Together For A Better Future

Divorcing with the best possible outcome *by Beatrice Hogg*

When Jane's* marriage to Howard* ended, the stay-at-home mom had to figure out how she would support herself and her family. Jane once worked as a high-level executive, but now, in her 40s, she stayed at home to care for their special needs child. Her ex-husband's job was the family's main source of income, and Jane might not have received sufficient financial support in a traditional divorce. She considered mediation for their divorce, but her husband's lawyer recommended they look into Collaborative Divorce.

"Learn to let go of some things to reserve your energy for when you really need it. Sometimes things need to fall apart to get a better conclusion. I'm thankful for Collaborative [Divorce]."

Coaches and specialists made a difference in her life, providing services she would not have received in a traditional divorce.

When her divorce started, Jane says she was worn out. The stress of caring for their daughter and the emotional wear and tear from her marriage was almost too much to bear. Since she recently moved to Sacramento, she did not have a circle of friends or family that she could rely on for assistance or empathy. When she met with her divorce coach, she says, "I was an emotional basket case." Her coach talked to her about the emotional part of the

divorce process and understood the issues surrounding the care of a special needs child.

The neutral child specialist was part of the team to represent the child's interests. Consideration of the child's current and future needs made a big difference in developing an outcome that was beneficial. The child specialist looked at issues from the child's standpoint, which were then discussed with the group.

At first, Jane wasn't sure that Collaborative Divorce would work, due to the very strained relationship between her and Howard. But by working with the divorce coaches, Howard was able to see her in a different light and understand what she was going through. The process included regular meetings for more than six months.

The neutral financial specialist reviewed Jane's monthly expenses and determined that she needed more money to care for their daughter. Jane says this independent and neutral viewpoint had more impact on her husband than anything she could have said to him. Even when she and her husband were not meeting, Jane says, their divorce coaches were working on their behalf.

Jane recommends Collaborative Divorce — especially when there are children involved. She advises, "Listen to the Collaborative [team] even if [their advice] sounds crazy — they know what they're talking about."

Jane still uses some of their advice today. "Learn to let go of some things to reserve your energy for when you really need it. Sometimes things need to fall apart to get a better conclusion," she says. "I'm thankful for Collaborative [Divorce]."

**Indicates name has been changed to protect client's privacy.*



Is this process right for you?

Here are some additional questions to ask yourself:

- Are you open to solutions that will respect you and your spouse's needs and interests?
- Do you want to make decisions affecting your future and the future of your family from a calm place?
- Do you want to act ethically for yourself, your spouse and for the sake of your children?
- Do you want a mechanism for your children's feelings to be considered?
- When the divorce is completed, do you want to be able to look back and feel good about the outcome and how you handled yourself during the process?

(Adapted from "Is Collaborative Divorce a Suitable Process For Me?" by Nancy J. Foster, JD, Northern California Mediation Center, San Rafael, CA)

If you have more questions about Collaborative Divorce, please see our website at www.divorceoption.com or the International Academy of Collaborative Professionals at www.collaborativepractice.com or contact any of the collaborative professionals listed on the back page.

Collaborating Through A Divorce

Attorneys keep divorcing couples out of court

by Sukhi K. Brar

Attorney Paul Brimberry has represented clients in contentious divorce cases for over 30 years. Litigation often leaves at least one party unhappy and has given Brimberry many sleepless nights. Brimberry knew there was a better way to handle divorces and about 15 years ago decided to help create a process where couples could come together and solve things outside of the courtroom. This idea spurred the creation of the Sacramento Collaborative Practice Group with other like-minded professionals. The group, which began in 1997, focuses on helping divorcing families achieve the best possible solution for all parties involved.

"The biggest difference between being in a courtroom and Collaborative Divorce is that the court process is almost always win-lose and someone is unhappy," Brimberry says.

Collaborative Divorce is a better process in which a divorcing couple, along with trained professionals, works as a team to resolve disputes respectfully and without going to court. Each spouse has a divorce coach, in addition to their own attorney.

"Clients see that what they have achieved will keep them out of court this time and in the future. They have learned the skills to deal with challenging situations and can do so on their own in the future."

Lauren Craig
Attorney

"Divorce is an emotional process. The coaches help the clients build communication skills, which helps minimize breakdowns and provides better resolution of issues," says Hal Bartholomew, another attorney member of Sacramento Collaborative Practice Group.

If the couple has children, a neutral child specialist works in the best interests of the entire family and assesses what needs the children may have.

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"Often, the children are more honest. They don't feel they have to choose between parents or say something to please a parent. They just say what they would like to have happen," attorney April Maynard says.

Collaborative Divorce also includes neutral financial specialists, who provide advice and assist couples with their finances while dividing up assets on their own terms.

"Neutral financial specialists help with the financial piece of things ... and on average, going through the collaborative process costs the couple about half as much as going through litigation," says Bartholomew.

Putting all of these pieces in place can help move the process along faster than it would in the court process. In the end, couples are able to achieve a more favorable resolution in a less hostile setting.

"Couples can achieve solutions on their own terms. In court, the judge must follow the law when dividing assets even if the couple would prefer something else," explains Bartholomew.

The communication skills the clients gain during Collaborative Divorce have a lasting effect.

"Clients see that what they have achieved will keep them out of court this time and in the future. They have learned the skills to deal with challenging situations and can do so on their own in the future," says attorney Lauren Craig.

The Attorney's Role

Each of you has a collaboratively trained attorney to advise you about your rights and responsibilities and assist you in negotiating your agreement. Collaborative Attorneys focus their efforts on helping you develop creative solutions.

The Importance Of Communication

Coaching clients through a divorce

by Bryce Brown

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In her seven years as a divorce coach with Sacramento Collaborative Practice Group, Linda Tell has helped countless couples make positive decisions during the restructuring of their family. Coaches like Tell act as a personal ally and helper for individuals who are going through a divorce. She says, "We coach some people to speak up and find ways to negotiate and coach others to slow down and listen."

The importance of a divorce coach in Collaborative Divorce cannot be overstated. The stressful nature of a divorce necessitates having a coach, who is dedicated to providing support in whatever way the person needs, whether it's emotional encouragement, assisting with stress management or teaching effective communication skills. "Divorce is one of the most stressful times a person will ever have in their life," Tell says. "People deserve to have the assistance of someone who's skilled and knows what to anticipate and how to avoid some of the common pitfalls that can occur when they get a divorce."

In Collaborative Divorce, each spouse sees a separate coach. The coach works with the spouse to ensure that their feelings, concerns and needs can be expressed in a positive and constructive manner. "My experience as a therapist has been that people come to me as they're going through a divorce and they're a mess. It's usually about a two-year period of time that they are in a major



transition in their lives," says divorce coach Kate Byrnes. "They're emotionally grieving the death of their relationship. It is one of the greatest stressors that people can have. In Collaborative Divorce, they're committing to work through the issues cooperatively and come up with an agreement they can both live with."

In such an emotionally-charged environment, discussions between spouses can take a negative turn in an instant. Coaches work with a spouse to identify specific triggers that generate a negative emotional response. "I try to find out what's going on inside of them," says divorce coach Renee Steele. "Then I work with them to find ways to manage their stress. We're going to be at a table together and what's going to happen if they go into that 'fight or flight' response?"

Whether working with the husband or the wife, the coach supports the person from the start of the process to the finish. Coaches are present at meetings so they can direct and guide the

behavior of the person, while constantly keeping the process focused on a cooperative solution.

Cooperation is what sets Collaborative Divorce apart from traditional litigated divorce. You take control of your future.

The Divorce Coach

You each have a collaboratively trained divorce coach to help you manage the strain of changing relationships, improve communication skills and focus on goals for today and the future. Your coach helps you be at your emotional best during this difficult time.

"Divorce is one of the most stressful times a person will ever have in their life. People deserve to have the assistance of someone who's skilled and knows what to anticipate to try to help them avoid some of the common pitfalls that people get into when they get a divorce."

Linda Tell
Divorce Coach



Money Matters

Financial specialist helps spouses develop financial options

by Barry Wisdom

When accountant Steven Rutlen joined the Sacramento Collaborative Practice Group, he was looking to fix a system he felt was broken and help people find fair, amicable solutions in the divorce process.

"I once met with a couple, in which both spouses worked. When I asked them how much they made, the wife didn't know," says Rutlen.

Though they had been separated for two years, Rutlen says the husband was still coming over to his estranged wife's home weekly to open up the bills and pay them.

"I told the wife that we needed to get her up to a level where she could manage her own finances," says Rutlen. "She didn't know where to start. But I met with her individually a few times to help build that knowledge. By the end of the process, she marched into our collaborative meetings with her financial binder and felt empowered to make decisions about her financial future. The benefit to the husband was they were able to make an agreement that would be successful."

"The question I ask is, 'Is this in the best interest of the family?' We want to see all members of the family prosper, even after the divorce."

Lynne Verdone
Financial Specialist

Kathleen Faulkner, a Sacramento Collaborative Practice Group financial specialist, says most married couples typically decide at the beginning of their relationship which one of the partners will act as the family's financial manager. When they're faced with unwinding that marriage, there's high emotional content, as well as financial and legal issues with which to contend.

"The spouse, who was not the designated financial manager, usually experiences fear, trauma and panic," Faulkner says. "I'll tell clients that ending a marriage is very similar to liquidating a company."

During the divorce process there are many hidden or unforeseen costs, for which couples are unprepared.

"Traditional divorces are very damaging, with more than simply the dollar costs involved. There's the emotional toll and, down the road, the physical damages caused by stress — which are far more expensive."

In Collaborative Divorce, Faulkner's role is to assist in creating an equitable financial future for both individuals.

While the assets each spouse receives in a traditional divorce may be equal at the time a decree is declared, their worth may change over time, leaving one of the ex-spouses in poor financial condition.

"Educating the couple, so they understand all these marbles on the table they're trading with may have different cash consequences, is part of my job," explains Lynne Verdone, another financial specialist, who sits with her clients to model and project different property division scenarios for both parties.

"The question I ask is, 'Is this in the best interest of the family?' We want to see all members of the family prosper, even after the divorce."

The Financial Specialist

"My mission is to educate the couple — especially the member who is not as familiar with the family's finances — so they can effectively negotiate with each other," says Steven Rutlen, with the Sacramento Collaborative Practice Group, who sees the financial specialist's role in Collaborative Divorce as much about education and confidence-building as about spreadsheets and settlements.

In Collaborative Divorce, the financial specialist works with the couple as their "financial neutral." In the typical adversarial divorce, each party has their own financial adviser, and each has their own set of documents.

"The first time I meet with a couple, it's like putting together a 500-piece financial jigsaw puzzle. When it's all done, they're able to stand back and effectively negotiate the marital estate," says Seth Kaplan, a financial specialist.

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Advocating For Children During Divorce

Child specialist keeps children in mind during Collaborative Divorce

by Kendall Fields

To children, divorce jolts their world. Children often assume they caused the separation; they want their parents to stay together and desperately try to repair their family. Children may lose their home, security and stability in a separation. And even more daunting, a divorce is not something a child chooses.

"Most of the time, young children don't even know what divorce means," Betsey Williams says. Williams is a child specialist and member of the Sacramento Collaborative Practice Group. "Bringing in the neutral child specialist is a unique opportunity to have someone with a lot of training and experience truly represent what is in the best interest of the children," Williams says.

"Divorce does not have to damage children for the rest of their lives. But, how the parents go through the process is going to impact how children learn about relationships."

Betsey Williams
Child Specialist

Deni Deutsch Marshall, a child specialist with Sacramento Collaborative Practice Group, explains that the role of a child specialist in the divorce process is not only to assess a child's needs during divorce, but also to educate the parents on what they can do to guide their children toward a successful life after their parents' divorce. Marshall, who even sees college-aged children, says "Children are like sponges — and although they are resilient — they soak up the emotional energy around them." She explains this is important to remember during the divorce process.

"Children can get lost in the shuffle of divorce," Marshall says, adding that regressing in development and acting out is common during separation. She and her colleagues encourage parents to spend one-on-one time with their children to address all of their

needs. She stresses that each child deals with divorce differently because of age, gender, temperament and developmental stage.

During Collaborative Divorce, the neutral child specialist meets with both parents together and listens to their impressions and concerns about each of their children. The parents fill out an extensive questionnaire for each child, so the child specialist can assess their relationships and begin to gauge each child's development and reaction to the divorce. This initial meeting can also serve as a forum for parents to voice concerns and ask questions about their children.

After talking with parents, the child specialist meets with each child to get a better understanding of how they are dealing with the divorce and address any concerns. Tim Rood, another child specialist, says a big part of this meeting is determining what a successful future might look like for each child. "This is the time where I ask the children, 'What is something your mom or dad could do better? What do you want your parents to know?'"

After these meetings, the child specialist meets with the parents and the Collaborative Divorce team to present their impressions on each child. Parents find this information very helpful in developing a parenting plan.

"Divorce does not have to damage children for the rest of their lives," Williams says. "But, how parents go through the process is going to impact how children learn about relationships."

The Child Specialist

Children should be a priority, not a casualty. The child specialist meets with your children privately, helping them express their feelings and concerns about the divorce. The child specialist then communicates their feelings, concerns and hopes to the parents and the team to consider when planning for the children's lives.



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Q & A

With Justice Fred Morrison
(Retired, 3rd District Court of Appeal)

by Mike Blount



Image courtesy of Justice Fred Morrison

Retired Appellate Justice Fred Morrison believes Collaborative Divorce provides the best possible outcome for all parties going through a divorce. A former family law judge, Morrison has seen families torn apart during the divorce process. Since learning about Collaborative Divorce, Morrison has advocated the approach over traditional divorce. He currently works as a mediator judge with JAMS Arbitration.

What are some common things you saw during a divorce when you were a family law judge?

People would have a lot of anger and anxiety. People would usually fight about two things — spousal support and their kids. This is something I used to tell people in my court who were fighting over everything, “Whose kids would you like to send to college? Your kids or your lawyers’ kids?”

“Collaborative Divorce reduces a lot of the bitterness that can poison a relationship. If there are children, there’s going to be a relationship between the parents for the rest of their lives.”

Justice Fred Morrison (retired)

Another thing that always troubled me was when one parent would bad mouth the other in front of their kids. Even if it’s partially true, it’s a bad idea. Some lawyers back then were very good at getting their clients to work things out. Sometimes, one lawyer would stir things up and make things more difficult. Collaborative Divorce reduces a lot of the bitterness that can poison a relationship. If there are children, there’s going to be a relationship between the parents for the rest of their lives.

Is there any one case that particularly affected you?

When cases would always get to me is when children were involved. There’s one in particular I remember where the mother and father were both very caring parents and were getting a divorce. The mother met a new man, but she wanted to move to Los Angeles. She had sole custody, but the father ended up moving there too to be close to his kids. That’s an amazing commitment to his kids. It’s always very difficult to put the kid in the middle of the divorce.

Why is Collaborative Divorce a better option in your opinion?

It just makes a lot of sense to do things in a cooperative way instead of fighting. The lawyers on each side have agreed to not go to court and work it out, committed to an agreement that avoids all the expense and bitterness that is engendered by the process. ... Another reason is, in Collaborative Divorce, you have control over it. You haven’t abandoned control to a judge and you can agree to things and not agree to things, but at least you haven’t lost control. ... It’s also less expensive and it produces a lot less anxiety and anger and upset and emotional strain. I have not been through a divorce, which I am thankful for, but I think it’s the best way to make the best of a very difficult situation.

What would you say to someone considering their options for divorce?

I would say the first thing you should do is attempt to do Collaborative Divorce. If both parties have good will, there’s no reason why it won’t work out in both of your best interests and the children’s. Barring something like one party trying to hide assets or take advantage of the other side, Collaborative Divorce is the best alternative for divorce.



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The Tools To Move On

Divorce Options Workshop provides information you need

by Linda DuBois

The thought of getting a divorce can be confusing and overwhelming. People can find comfort and make far better decisions if they are educated early on about the divorce process and their options.

That's why the Sacramento Collaborative Practice Group has developed the Divorce Options Workshop.

For four hours on a Saturday morning, the group's members give an unbiased overview of basic information to help people considering divorce explore their options and move forward with their lives.

It includes the legal, financial, psychological and social issues of divorce, available community resources, and how to select the best option for saving time, money and frustration.

The typical schedule includes attorneys outlining divorce options including self-representation, mediated divorce, Collaborative Divorce, traditional negotiation and litigated divorce. Attorneys also talk about the stages in the divorce process, child custody, child and spousal support, property and differences in married and domestic partner divorces.

A financial specialist provides an overview to help prepare for divorce, including division of property, real estate issues and tax consequences.

With a basic understanding of the legal steps they have to go through, when people eventually sit down with an attorney, they can ask more informed questions.

A mental health professional discusses emotional issues such as: dealing with guilt, anger and grief; how to break the news to children and the impact divorce can have on them; how to co-parent more effectively; and how to preserve relationships with extended family.

There is a question and answer period at the end.

Even though there's a set agenda, the amount of time spent talking about a particular issue is tailored to the participants' needs.

A common thread among workshop participants is that many have had well-meaning friends and relatives give them advice that's biased by their own experiences, sometimes telling them to go out and hire an aggressive litigating attorney. But getting into a nasty legal battle can not only rack up the costs, but also tear families apart. And if there are children, conflict between parents can cause long-term harm.

It's not uncommon for a litigating attorney to say, "Don't talk to your spouse. Only talk to me." But the workshop educates people to keep the lines of communication open.

People can get distorted views from TV and movies that depict divorce, Sacramento Collaborative Practice Group members say. During a time of stress, people's imaginations can run away with them. The fear of the unknown can be overwhelming. This workshop will help dispel that fear.

There are many people who don't realize there are alternatives in how they resolve their divorce.

Participants have found the workshop to be very helpful — some of them have written evaluations explaining how it improved their divorce process. Workshop participants have attested to the value found in the programs. One participant writes: "I learned that it doesn't have to be so negative ... I have more knowledge and feel more empowered to make a better choice ... My husband and I attended the workshop at the same time so we could hear the same information ... I liked hearing about the options that are more focused on family."

All this professional information comes at a very low cost: \$45 per person to cover the workshop space rental and materials. The volunteer presenters usually include two attorneys, a financial specialist and a mental health professional.

Mental health professionals may attend for free so they can provide the information to their clients.

During a time of stress, people's imaginations can run away with them. The fear of the unknown can be overwhelming. This workshop will help dispel that fear.

The workshop, which started two years ago in the Sacramento area, is now offered statewide by various Collaborative Divorce groups and there is growing interest in other states. Locally, workshops are offered every second Saturday. Locations throughout the Sacramento region include Chico, Fairfield, Folsom, Placerville, Roseville, Sacramento and Stockton. Advance registration is not required.

For information on dates and locations, visit www.divorceoption.com or call the Sacramento Collaborative Practice Group at (916) 863-9777.

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