

Five Tips for Making Better Divorce Decisions

Divorce can be unfair in that it requires you to make some of the most important decisions in your life during a time when you might feel the least equipped to make those decisions. This may feel overwhelming, particularly if you are struggling with emotions. Nevertheless, it is important to consider the importance of the decisions you are about to make.

Five Steps to Preparing to Make Better Decisions During Divorce

The decisions you make during the divorce are likely to have a major impact on the path that you take. The purpose of this decision making guide is to help you make the kinds of decisions that will allow you to be on the path to help you emerge from this difficult time in a way that builds a brighter future. You will be far likely to make better decisions during your divorce if you can focus on the following five areas, from the very beginning.

1. Prepare yourself
2. Create a plan
3. Learn some basic things about divorce law
4. Learn about your process choices
5. Learn how to get the help you need

Let's look at these five steps separately.

1. Prepare yourself (i.e. Take care of yourself)

Perhaps the most critical element of making good decisions is preparing yourself to be in a position to make the best possible judgments. This is not as easy as it may seem. Divorce is incredibly unfair in that it asks you to make the most difficult decisions in your life, at a time in which you may feel least equipped to do so. The anger, fear, and sadness that often accompany divorce can often cause the most rational person to act against his or her own best interests. (Most of us have observed many examples of how this can be true.)

If you recognize that your judgment may be impaired by the emotions surrounding the divorce you are ahead of many people. It is easy to act out of fear or anger in a divorce without realizing how much these emotions are impairing your judgment. Once you have recognized the negative impact of these emotions you can start to consider what to do about them.

Time

There is an old saying that time heals all wounds. While that may not be literally true, it is a fact that much pain will dissipate with the passage of time. Therefore, taking steps to slow down your divorce might sometimes increase your ability to make better decisions.

Sometimes people have the opposite reaction. The pain and difficulty of the divorce can be so great, that there can be a very natural tendency to rush through the divorce decisions with the belief that the healing cannot begin until the divorce is over. This type of thinking, while completely understandable, can lead to hurried decisions that, in the end, can prolong difficulties. Therefore, it is important to try to set a pace for your divorce that allows you to prepare yourself to make the best possible decisions.

And, while time will heal some wounds, it is important to look at divorce as a healthcare issue in which additional assistance is necessary or helpful.

Help/advice and support

Most people rely on others to help them prepare to make the best possible decisions. These can be professionals, (such as your lawyer or counselor) or friends and family members. In looking to other people for help, it is important to separate out the need for expert advice, that will often require professionals, and true support, that can best come from friends and family. Confusing the need for advice with the need for support rarely goes unpunished, particularly in divorce.

Later in this guide I will describe ways in which you can select professionals who work within the divorce process (lawyers, coaches, child specialists, etc.). At this point, I simply want to point out the need for other professionals who can help you in the emotional preparation that is not necessarily connected to the divorce process itself. A good example would be a therapist or counselor who helps you address many situations in your life, including the emotional aspects of your divorce.

2. Create a plan

Another critical element in helping you make the best possible decisions is to have a plan and set goals. The drama of a divorce can easily cause people to focus all of their energy and money on short-term “urgent” issues, while losing sight of the far more important “big-picture” goals.

Many of us have heard countless stories of people in divorce who spent thousands of dollars fighting over matters of small significance. Having a clear plan will help you fall into this common trap. As the saying goes, “If you don’t know where you are going, you will end up somewhere else.”

When I use the word “plan” here, I mean a focus on big-picture goals, interests or aspirations, rather than specific positions or details that tend to overwhelm us during divorce.

3. Learn some basic things about divorce law

Of course, making the best possible decisions during a divorce is also a function of getting education. You are about to embark on a journey through a strange land. And while you will likely hire guides to help you on this journey, (such as attorneys or counselors), it is important that you educate yourself as well, so that you will be able to actively participate in planning your future. While there are many areas in which you will want to gain knowledge, we will focus on the two primary areas here: The law and the divorce process.

Learning about the law

During your divorce, you will, of course, want to gain a clear understanding about how the law will impact your decisions during the divorce. As you will see, the law, while helpful, will not answer all of the questions about how your divorce decisions will be made. Most laws simply provide a framework for your decisions, leaving it to you and your spouse to make decisions within that framework.

Your education about the law, as it relates to divorce, will likely come in layers. Your lawyer, and others, will likely give you advice about this throughout the process. However, it is a good idea to get an overview of the law, at the very beginning so that you will have a general understanding of how the law may affect your decisions.

4. Learn about your process choices

As important as it is to have some understanding of the law, before you get started, it is probably even more important to have some understanding about the divorce process. That is because you will very likely be making divorce process choices very soon, they will have a major impact on the outcome of your divorce.

When I talk about process here, I mean the ways in which decisions get made. As we have already discussed, divorce is, among other things, a series of decisions. How those decisions get made could be more important than the decision themselves. To learn about process choices, go to <http://www.ousky.com/divorce/process-choices.html>.

Choosing the right process for you can be difficult, but it worth the extra effort. It could be the most important decision you make in the divorce. The best way to get the necessary second layer of information is to interview competent professionals who work in each of these areas to help you make the best decision for your family.

Two Layers of Competent Information

I recommend that, before making any important divorce decisions, get two layers of competent information.

The first layer is made up of the written information, through websites, books, articles, materials that are readily accessible to you to give you some background about your decisions, before you meet with a professional. I do not recommend relying on this information alone. No website, book or article can address your unique situation or answer your specific questions. However, this first layer of information can form a foundation and help you ask questions of competent professionals, when you are ready to move into the second layer of information.

It is important to get competent information at both levels, including the written information you receive. Much of what you read, (including this website) is comprised largely of opinions of the author. Therefore, you need to make sure the materials and opinions are created by someone who is competent in a particular area. We live in an information age, in which we are surrounded by articles and websites generated by millions of people. A website, for example, can be written by a leading professional in a particular field, or by an individual who simply wants to express a point of view. It is critical to check out the information. To learn what we mean by “competent” information, go to <http://www.ousky.com/divorce/help-interview.html>.

The second layer of information will come from the professionals that will help you through the divorce. In order to seek out this second layer of competent information, you need to think about how to find professional help that you can trust.

5. Learn how to get the help you need.

No one should have to go through a divorce alone. You will make better decisions if you have support and advice from others. Deciding how to get the best help for your situation is one of the critical decisions you will be making. To learn more about how to get the support and advice you need, go to <http://www.ousky.com/divorce/help.html>.