

Collaborative Divorce (or Any Mediation Process): Be Prepared and Organized to Reduce Your Stress and Costs

- Purchase a Binder for documents with, for example, the following dividers: Signed Agreements, CD Process Info, Coach Info/Notes/Homework, Child Specialist Info/Notes/Homework, Attorney Info/Notes/Homework, Financial Info/Notes/Homework, Full Team Meetings/Notes/Homework. Bring to each meeting with any Team Member. Not bringing needed documents when you have scheduled a meeting leaves you paying professionals for less productive times.
- Summarize your concerns as succinctly and factually as possible on paper prior to meeting with your professionals. Rambling, lengthy explanations and storytelling require more costly professional time. Take time *yourself* to consider what's really important to you, and how to present it in the clearest, simplest and most straightforward way possible. Also consider typing up bullet points and sharing a copy with your professional, to help keep you on point. Divorce is typically very difficult emotionally. The more time you take to think through your concerns and type these up in advance, in bulleted form, without judgmental language, the more focused and on-point you'll be during meetings.
- Make your own copies to keep of any forms you fill out/sign and provide to anyone on your Team. If necessary, remind your team to provide copies for you of their documents.
- Bring your calendar to each meeting. It will significantly increase your stress and cost when we have to call or email everyone to reschedule meetings that work for everyone.
- Ask for as much homework as possible to do on your own, so that you do more and your professionals do less, wherever this is possible. If you are not able to complete assigned tasks by when you say you will, this will erode the trust and goodwill you need to come to an agreement out of court, and will require more professional help.
- Calendar specific times to complete your homework. Plan and organize your time thoughtfully and realistically. Work backwards from the next meeting time, and schedule blocked out chunks of time to handle what needs to be done by you. Not being prepared for a meeting stalls the whole process, with professionals being paid to wait for you to catch up or finish.
- Take your own notes at meetings so you can refer to these later, especially regarding areas that are unclear or challenging for you. Divorce is generally stressful, and co-parenting can also be difficult. Anyone in your position would have difficulty recalling what was said/explained. Someone from your Team may also take minutes at each meeting but they may not be especially attuned to the issues that matter *to you*, in particular. You may be asked to approve notes taken professionally.
- Respectfully request that professionals write-up: 1) Partner's Stated Interests, 2) Agreements, 3) Tasks (including who and *by when these are due*) on a whiteboard. Offer to take a picture and email this to the team, rather than paying professionals to type up detailed minutes for each meeting.
- Star items during meetings that you have questions/are unsure about. If necessary, ask the Team respectfully to wait for you, to make sure you have time to at least write down your question(s). Your Team Member (e.g. Coach/Co-mediator) may refer your question to another Team Member (e.g. lawyer or financial specialist), or that question may need to be asked at a different meeting. But don't let the question go. Write it down.
- Keep a running list of concerns and questions you need answered. You are not likely to recall these automatically during meetings, especially when you are stressed. Once you've written down your questions, decide later where those questions and answers go in your binder – e.g. Legal? Financial? Communication (Coach)? Parenting Plan (Coach/Child Specialist)? Personal therapist? Be prepared to ask about these at your next meeting if the question is left unanswered.

- Develop a system for keeping track of unanswered questions. Keep these filed under the binder sections where they belong (e.g. Unanswered questions about finances may go under Lawyer AND Financial Specialist sections.). Look for and review these *before each meeting with your professional.* You may wish to have a list of questions at the front of each section. There is no problem with your bringing a laptop to document as we go along. You may save money and it may lower your anxiety to review your notes after each meeting.
- Think about and keep a running list of win-win solutions to challenges you are both facing. That is, think carefully about how things can be designed to work for BOTH of you. Avoid trying to “sell” your view. Get help and use your professional support (Coach, Child Specialist, personal therapist, child therapist, etc.) to help you map out workable options and strategies for approaching these issues effectively and non-reactively.