

WHAT TO THINK ABOUT BEFORE MEETING WITH MEDIATOR OR ATTORNEY

(to save yourself sanity and money)

1. Prepare a list of questions. Many clients are unsure what to ask, or are so overwhelmed they simply forget what they wanted to ask. The interview is much more effective if it can be tailored to your specific needs. That way, you are assured to leave the interview with the information you need. What are your concerns? Do you worry about how you will support the children and pay the bills during the divorce? Is your spouse telling you that you must move out of the marital home before the completion of the divorce?
2. Compile your financial data to include your assets and liabilities. Be prepared for financial questions from your divorce attorney. Come to the first meeting prepared to tell the attorney what you own, and what you owe. Arrive with copies of your available financial records to include tax returns, mortgage statements, credit card statements, retirement account statements, paystubs, business records, and any other document relating to your financial situation. Do you know how much is in your spouse's retirement account, or what your mortgage balance is? Do you know the names and balances of your credit cards?
3. Prepare a list of background information. Your list should contain names, addresses, social security numbers, and employer information for both you and your spouse, the names and birth dates of your children, and the name of the medical insurance provider for you and your children. Do you know the name and policy number of the children's medical provider? Do you know the children's social security numbers?
4. Prepare a goals list. Outline what you want at the conclusion of the divorce proceeding. It may be impossible to know your exact expectations prior to consulting a mediator or an attorney. Hence, this list may not be all-inclusive. However, it is important to convey to the mediator/attorney your current expectations regarding custody, parenting time, and the division of the marital assets. Are you seeking custody of the minor children? Do you want to keep the marital home?
5. Discuss a budget with your attorney. Every divorce is unique. However, a candid conversation with the attorney about fees and costs is necessary. Your interview should include a discussion about the attorney's hourly fee, their retainer fee, and any costs related to your case. To avoid disappointment, go into the relationship with a full understanding of your financial responsibilities. What is the attorney's retainer fee? Will you be responsible to pay for travel costs, copies and postage?

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR MEDIATOR/ATTORNEY DURING YOUR FIRST MEETING

- 1) What kind of experience do you have with similar cases?
- 2) What would be your strategy for my case?
- 3) Are there any alternatives to going to court?
- 4) What are my *possible* outcomes?
- 5) Who will actually handle my case (the attorney or an associate, which can save money)?
- 6) What is my role in my case?