

How to have a cost-conscious divorce

Anyone going through a divorce knows how expensive it can be. A family lawyer's hourly rate, combined with the complexity and unpredictability of a divorce case, makes getting the exact cost of a divorce something of a moving target throughout the process. For those who are concerned about the cost of a divorce, there are a few strategies they can employ in keeping the billable hours as low as possible.

Do your homework

Divorce is a legal process that determines how assets and debts are divided up. Because of this, it's vital that your legal team gets a clear picture of what's being divided. The more paperwork you can provide at the outset, clearly showing all the assets and debts you have as a couple and individually, the better. Divorces can slow down—and rack up more billable hours—simply because your legal team has to reach out and ask for documents necessary in quantifying the marital estate. The work you do in getting that together can save you money.

Please see the lists in section below on this page called “What do I need to know if I am contemplating divorce?” It will give you lists to start your homework.

[What information do I need to gather?](#)

[What legal information do I need to know?](#)

Don't act out of spite

While you can certainly feel anger in the divorce process, remember that those feelings can complicate a case. Some people opt to file motions, insist on non-standard additions to temporary orders, or use delaying tactics through their lawyers, just because they're angry. Sometimes, there are sound reasons for your legal team to take extra steps on your behalf, but sometimes, they're merely intended to punish the other party, and they can be costly.

Keep emotions out of it altogether

Anger's not the only emotion you might feel in a divorce. In low moments, it might be tempting to talk to your lawyer—who, after all, knows the details of your case and who you've come to trust. But you must remember that your lawyer is not your therapist. It's true that divorce is both an emotional and a legal process, and it's challenging to do both simultaneously. But it's more productive (and less expensive!) for you to talk to a professional therapist about your emotions, and let your lawyer handle the legal part of your divorce.

Consider alternatives to litigation

When a divorce case goes to court, that's when the costs can really mount, as you'll be billed a lawyer's hourly rate for the time he or she spends in court, as well as the time that other staff members are engaged in supporting the lawyer's efforts in court. Those concerned about court costs should consider either collaborative law or mediation—they're alternatives to litigation that can dramatically cut the time and therefore the cost when compared to a litigated case. As a bonus, those means of resolution give the participants more control over the outcome; it's not left up to a judge to decide, based on arguments made by lawyers in court.

The bottom line is that even though divorce is unpredictable, and no two divorces are alike, there are elements within your control that will help you control costs—as well as missteps you can make that will add to your cost. If cost is a concern, make sure you talk to your lawyer about that—at your initial consultation, if possible—so the both of you can be on the same page.