



How to End a Marriage

There are ways to do this responsibly.

*By Adam Bulger
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It's hard to imagine a best case scenario for a divorce. Divorce conjures images of fights, heartbroken adults, and emotionally devastated children. But that obscures an important truth: divorce can often be the right thing to do, for all parties involved. Not all marriages are built to last. And, as Connecticut-based divorce attorney Meghan Freed notes, often people don't remain in bad marriages for honorable reasons. They don't stay out of duty or because they believe they can make it work. They stay because they're too afraid to end it once and for all.

"A common thing that I see men go through is actually staying too long," Freed says. "Part of leaving a relationship responsibly and respectfully is getting up the courage to do it."

But once you're sure (very sure) you want your marriage to end, and have told your partner you want a divorce, you should know how to end a marriage responsibly. Ending a marriage isn't a sign of failure or weakness. But it is something that requires care, and it can often be clouded by the many emotions that come with the decision.

So what do you do to end a marriage? What steps must be taken? Who needs to be called? What can you do to ensure that your marriage ends as cleanly as possible, with the best possible outcomes for all involved?. That's why we put together this guide on how to end a marriage the right way, including finding divorce lawyers, getting paperwork together, and making the big decisions

involved. Follow them to ensure that the key players, including yourself, are treated fairly.

1. Accept The Need to Make Tough Choices

Family law attorney Aliette Carolan finds that many men facing the end of their marriages aren't prepared to do what's necessary to move on to the next stage of their lives. They're facing dramatic change and try to hide from it instead of facing it. "A lot of men take the ostrich approach and bury their head in the sand to avoid the conflict," she says. "However, that just makes everything worse in the end." Get into the proper headspace to make sure everything is handled cleanly.

2. Discuss Your Options With Experts

Divorce is complicated. Very complicated. And costly. Experts agree: the real answers to your questions won't be found on the internet. "You can Google all day long and find an answer that fits what you want to hear," says Kristen Hirashima of the California firm Shebby Hirashima. "However, that won't be helpful to you in the long run." As early as possible, make appointments with several attorneys in your area to ask them about divorce. Shake them down for information about ending a marriage — they'll offer far more reliable legal advice than Google.

3. Decide on Your Priorities

While you learn your options for divorce, you need to decide your priorities for your life going forward. What's important to you? Holding on to money? Making the divorce as quick and painless as possible, regardless of cost? Staying friends with your ex? The welfare of your kids? Hirashima says that defining your priorities at the outset of your divorce and re-examining throughout your case is important. "There may be some rocky waters and tough decisions during the divorce process, and reminding yourself of your priority will help you make decisions in line with it," she says

4. Choose the Divorce Attorney Who's Right for You

Think of those initial sit-downs with attorneys as akin to speed-dating: If you don't see a serious future with them, it's okay to walk away. "No good attorney will ever be upset that a potential client sought multiple opinions and just like with a large purchase," Sarah E. Bennett, a Family Law attorney at Sodoma Law in Charlotte, North Carolina, says. "Comparison shopping for attorneys may be helpful to ensure you are confident in your representation," Bennett says. Attorneys skilled in negotiation and collaborative law can help clients work things out with your spouse outside the court system while experienced litigators are needed for divorces predicted to be hostile or aggressive.

5. Round Out Your Divorce Team

Your divorce attorney will be the star player for your divorce. But if the split is complicated due to money, children, tensions between former spouses, or all of the above, you may need to bring in other professionals as well.

"Forensic accountants can help uncover hidden assets and determine needs with respect to alimony and child support, therapists and counselors can help with self-care and address the emotional issues related to divorce, financial planners can ensure that your assets are appropriately allocated post-separation, and estate planning attorneys can help protect your family and plan for the future distribution of assets," she says. And, as Hirashima points out, "therapists are much cheaper to speak to than your lawyer."

6. Assemble Your Financial Records

Bennett says people undergoing divorce should put aside several hours to sort through their finances. She typically has clients gather at least two years' worth of tax returns and W-2s, a year's worth of paystubs and documentation of any other income. In addition, they need bank and investment account statements, documentation for big ticket items such as homes, businesses, or vehicles, and statements for mortgages, credit cards, lines of credit, and student loans. It's a chore to amass all those records but it's not like you have a choice. If you don't do it now, the court could order to do it later. "While it saves a great deal of time, energy, and money if spouses will voluntarily agree

to exchange financial documentation, an attorney can issue subpoenas or discovery requests to ensure that all necessary documents are collected,” says Bennett.

7. Find Someone to Follow The Money

If the split is acrimonious, your ex could move around their money or exploit loopholes to make the court think they have less wealth than they really do. California financial therapist Tara Tussing Unverzagt says divorcing spouses can find creative ways to hide money by asking employers to delay bonuses until after their divorce was finalized. Some hide money in a business or request that their boss hold onto work bonuses until after the divorce. Others even enlist the Federal government as unwitting accomplices in scamming their spouses. “Money can be hidden with the IRS,” Unverzagt says. For example, a scheming soon-to-be ex spouse could make an oversized estimated tax payment to get money out of his accounts while the courts examine his holdings. “After the divorce, he’d get a big tax refund to get the money back, with his ex-wife none the wiser,” Unverzagt says. If needed, end of marriage money specialists called certified divorce financial analysts can flush your ex’s hidden money stashes.

8. Decide How You’ll Split Your Home

If you and your spouse share a home together, living arrangements and home ownership can be thorny problems. You and your former spouse have to decide if one person will buy the other person out, if you’ll sell the house and split the money, or make other arrangements.

“It’s really expensive to get a divorce and it’s more expensive when the two of you live separately than together,” Unverzagt says. “And that’s even more true if there are kids. I’ve known people who didn’t split because they couldn’t afford it.”

9. Learn to Look Back and Move Forward

Divorce is more intense than breaking up with someone you dated just out of college. You’ve got to do a lot more than just unfollow each other on

Instagram. And even after you've signed every legal document necessary to divorce, the marriage will still exert an influence on you. It's best to get comfortable with its lingering effects. "That relationship is ended, but it deserves to be honored, with or without kids," Connecticut-based divorce attorney Meghan Freed says. "This is the person whom you loved while it lasted. And you just want to treat them in accordance with that period."