

The Zen Divorce: Top 10 Tips for a More Peaceful Separation

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Going through a divorce or separation can be a stressful time, especially if children are involved. Here are some quick tips to help ensure the process goes smoothly and peacefully.

1. Get a Good Lawyer. This is a must-have for a smooth divorce process. Attorneys are there to help bear the stress of the divorce for our clients in addition to offer legal guidance. Not only should the attorney concentrate in family law but you should choose an attorney with whom you have good rapport. Attorneys have different styles and processes; be sure to ask the right questions to help you choose the right team member to help you through this transition. Whoever you select to represent you, be sure to listen to him and ask what you can do to help make their job easier.

2. Make Sure Your Spouse Gets a Good Lawyer. Yes, you read this correctly. The process will go more smoothly if your spouse gets a lawyer — it is even better if they get a GOOD lawyer. Unrepresented persons or attorneys not learned in matrimonial law will distrust trained divorce lawyers and feel they are being maneuvered or played. It is preferred that when both parties are represented with experienced family lawyers.

3. Settle In. Oftentimes people going through a divorce or separation want it to be over as soon as possible; in fact, they may have a fantasy that it will all be over in a month or so. But that really isn't the case. The biggest piece of advice that I have for people going through a divorce or separation is to settle in. Some divorces may take a few months while others may take a few years. Settle in and realize that there is a process and it likely won't be a quick one.

4. Get Your Financial Ducks in a Row. More often than not, economic issues are in play with a divorce or separation. A way to keep your legal fees down and help the process go more efficiently is to gather up 3 years' worth of tax returns, bank statements, credit cards, retirement statements and other financial documents. Work on an accurate Statement of Net Worth/ Financial Affidavit with a realistic budget by averaging your last 3 to 5 months of expenses. Talk to your attorney to see if more or less is expected and with what time period. The more that you can do to ensure this is well-organized and accurate when delivering to your lawyer, the more smooth the process will go.

5. Consider Mediation This is one of the biggest pieces of advice for a more peaceful separation, especially when children are involved. When businesses go to war against each other in the courtroom, they rarely (if ever) do business with one another afterwards. So when parents go to war in court, it is logical that the acrimony litigation creates makes it difficult to later co-parent. Mediation can be a powerful Alternative Dispute Resolution ("ADR") device to help facilitate a conversation on both children matters and economic issues. Be patient with the process

as it may take 2 to 5+ sessions to work through the issues, especially if there are complex financial issues.

6. Keep Your Children First. It is easy to forget just how much the divorce conflict itself can impact children. When parents are fighting over the principle of the thing or ways to feel more in control over the divorce litigation, they are invariably impacting their children. You can hate your spouse or love your children, but you can't do both. Hurting your spouse, hurts your kids. Remember those words throughout the divorce process for a more zen separation for you and the children.

7. Consider Working with a Divorce and/or Parenting Coach. Nobody prepares for a divorce or separation. When people are going through a stressful divorce or separation, it impacts how the brain remembers tasks and the ability to stay organized; a divorce coach can help clients each step of the way, including attending court with them or helping organize financial discovery. Similarly, parenting coaches can work with divorcing parents on how to talk to their children about the new shape and rhythm of the family while giving them skills to help them transition to a single parent.

8. Consider Individual and/or Co-Parenting Therapy. Most people going through a divorce or separation need someone to talk to and it is highly recommended that people seek out a licensed therapist. Some therapists offer co-parenting therapy to give parents communication skills with their new relationship. It is paramount that divorcing parents reflect on his or her own psychological needs and consider what communication tools can be useful through this transition.

9. Be Proactive Not Reactive. It is difficult in a divorce to know what is coming from your spouse or his or her lawyer. Simply because a stern letter was sent does not mean that you are in a bar fight and need to take the next swing. Be calm and logical through the process with the advice of counsel. Think about what you can do to prevent conflict and encourage cooperation.

10. Take Care of Yourself. Finally, the divorce process is inherently stressful and is a great time to really focus on yourself. Eat right. Exercise. Journal. Meditate. Mindfulness is about being aware and accepting what you're experiencing. Your divorce journey is individual to you. Focus on self-care and self-awareness instead of harming your soon-to-be ex. As cliché as it sounds, put your own oxygen mask on first and don't forget to breath.

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