

Divorce is a major life-changing event, but not all divorces have to be bad. Maybe you have a family member or friend who has gone through a divorce and had an awful experience with their spouse, their lawyer, their judge or the divorce process. Their negative experience does not have to be yours. With you and your spouse maintaining control over the conclusion of your marriage, your divorce experience does not have to be so bad. Always keep in mind that everyone has a different set of facts, so do not place too much weight on what others say about their divorce. In my experience as a family law attorney, I gear up our clients with the following tips:

- **Do your research.** Read books on divorce, go to a divorce workshop, interview lawyers, talk to friends for lawyer referrals to see how to best approach the process and which process to choose (collaborative law, mediation, litigation, or the “kitchen table” approach).
- **Get your finances in order.** If you have never handled the bills before, educate yourself before stepping into a divorce situation. There are professionals out there like Certified Divorce Financial Advisors who can walk you through the finances. Understand how much your family spends, what your assets are and their value and what are the balances on your debts.
- **Put together two household budgets:** one for your current home (presumably the marital residence) and one for where you can see yourself living. This is a tough one because it is hard to make a budget based on an unknown living situation. However, do your research—look at houses and apartments to rent or purchase so you have a better understanding. Do not wait to find out how much money you will get, rather be proactive and in charge of your own life. Figure out what your needs and the needs of your children will be.
- **Design a custody schedule** that will be attractive to both parents, if appropriate. The more attractive the schedule, the less fighting during the process. Do not put your children in harm’s way to make the schedule attractive, but



TOP DIVORCE TIPS

the reality is that the law looks at what is in the best interest of the child in PA. Typically, that translates into some kind of shared custody arrangement, barring any proof of abuse, addiction issues and/or criminal history. As always, be careful not to put the kids in the middle by using them as messengers or by saying not-so-nice things about the other parent. It will not help your custody case, and can actually make it worse.

• **If you plan to move out, have custody worked out before you do, if possible.** It is very hard to get back the time with your children if you leave or your spouse leaves. Oftentimes, parents leave strategically, to deprive the other parent of time with the children and/or for some financial gain. Other times,

a parent leaves to protect the children from abuse or witnessing arguments between the parents. In a dangerous situation, you should call the authorities for help. When one spouse has the kids and the other spouse does not, the non-custodial spouse will have to go through the court process to get time with the kids. The court or litigation process can be very drawn-out and expensive.

- **Be future focused.** Dwelling on the past will keep you stuck in the past. Of course, there is a grieving period for spouses in a divorce, but one way to overcome the grief is to look at the future. Even though it is difficult, the changes or relationship that you wanted from your spouse during the marriage and never got are typically not recoverable in a divorce either. Do not fight for spite, because in the end you will have spent a lot of money on the court process and likely will not be any happier. Think of a non-court option like collaborative law or mediation to end your marriage so you and your spouse maintain control, because families do not belong in court.

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CONSIDERING
A DIVORCE?**

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10475 Perry Highway, Suite 204, Wexford, PA 15090

This **Industry Insight** was written by Brooke B. McMorow. Attorney Brooke McMorow is the founding member and Managing Attorney of McMorow Law, LLC located in Wexford, Pennsylvania. McMorow Law focuses on family law matters such as divorce, custody, child support, guardianship, estate planning, and probate/estate administration in Pittsburgh and the surrounding counties. Attorney McMorow is collaboratively trained and a certified mediator. She is also a founding member of Collaborative Solutions North. She is licensed to practice in Pennsylvania and New York. For a free initial consultation call 724.940.0100 or visit the website at www.mcmorrowlaw.com.