

Non-Legal Resources to Get You through Your Divorce

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There are a number of resources that can be helpful to you before, during and after your divorce. These resources include a therapist, accountant and support groups. The following article provides guidelines for choosing such professionals.

How to Choose a Therapist

During times of great stress, it is often very helpful to have the aid and support of a neutral, objective third party. There are literally hundreds of marriage, family and child counselors, psychologists, and psychiatrists listed in the yellow pages. The relationship between therapist and patient is most often a close one. This person will get to know you, your emotions, your patterns of behavior and your desires. It is critical that you have a feeling of complete trust in this person, especially during what is probably one of the most vulnerable periods in your life.

One of the best ways to find a therapist who is suitable for you is to ask your friends and acquaintances. If they give you a referral, ask them if they have personal experience with this person and what the experience was like for them. Listen carefully to determine if what they describe would also work for you.

A second way to find a therapist is to ask your family doctor or your attorney. As professionals, they often work closely with therapists and can serve as a partial screen for you.

The following is a list of questions you should ask and criteria you should consider when choosing a therapist:

1. What licensing does the therapist have? Be sure that the therapist is licensed by the State of California and has special licenses or certifications demonstrating competency in dealing with family matters. The therapist should be a psychiatrist with a medical degree and license, have a Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology, or have an MFCC (Marriage, Family and Child therapist) license.
2. Is he/she been certified from a reputable and recognized school?
3. Have any complaints been filed with the Better Business Bureau against him/her?
4. What specific experience does the therapist have in dealing with people who are considering or going through a divorce?

5. What experience does he/she have in helping people work through emotional issues with children or custody matters? Ask for specific examples and years of experience with these issues.
6. Has the therapist been married? How does the therapist bring this personal experience into his/her practice?
7. What is the therapist's philosophy and principle for dealing with people going through a divorce? Does he/she take an active, directed approach in moving you through the process or does he/she let you guide the process? Does the therapist demonstrate an appropriate mix of just listening and letting you come to your own understanding and also giving you actual guidance (different people need different degrees of each).
8. What results can you expect from working with one therapist as opposed to working with another therapist?
9. Is there a rapport between you and the therapist? Do your personalities seem to mesh well?
10. Does the therapist listen to you?
11. Does he/she demonstrate an understanding of your situation?
12. Does the therapist give you a specified roadmap and timeline for working together, or does it seem like the process may take "forever?"
13. Is the therapist clear about his/her fees, and upfront about how much you can expect to spend?

Support Groups

There are a number of support groups available for individuals going through a divorce, as well as support groups that involve individuals and their children. Often, groups are available through a local church or synagogue.

One that we particularly recommend is Kid's Turn. Kid's Turn is an education program for Bay Area families who are undergoing, or have undergone, separation or divorce. Kid's Turn teaches family members the necessary skills to improve communication between children and parents and help parents understand their children's experience during and after divorce. Children learn coping skills to help deal with separation or divorce and their family's reorganization. The program is designed for children age four through 14 and parents. The following is their contact information:

Kid's Turn
1242 Market Street, 4th Floor
San Francisco, CA 94102-4802
(415) 437-0700
www.kidsturn.org

How to Choose an Accountant

Like a therapist, your accountant is going to get to know you very well, albeit in a rather different way. Your accountant will learn details of your financial life. A good accountant can be a guide in helping you plan your finances and prepare for your financial future when your marriage ends.

The following are suggested questions to ask before choosing an accountant:

1. Does the accountant have credentials from a reputable school and does he/she hold an active certified public accountant (CPA) license? To earn the CPA designation, accountants must pass a rigorous two- day professional examination, must meet stringent licensing requirements, and are required to stay current in their field.
2. Does the accountant have experience in family law matters, and is he/she knowledgeable about the subtleties and complexities of family law issues? During your interview, let the CPA know clearly the kinds of assistance you need. Then ask about his or her qualifications in dealing with family law matters, profiles of past clients, and availability to work with you.
3. Are you comfortable with the accountant's personality and communication style? You will most likely be forming a long-term relationship and want to feel absolutely comfortable in this relationship. Observe whether he/she asks you questions and then listens to your answers. Observe whether he/she explains things in clear English, in a way that you can understand. Do you feel comfortable asking additional questions if you do not understand?
4. Does the accountant give you a clear sense of his/her services and how much they cost? Be sure to talk openly about how the CPA will be compensated for his/her services. Normally, CPAs base their fees on the amount of time they spend performing services on your behalf.
5. Have there been complaints to the Better Business Bureau? You can check this by calling your local chapter.

One of the best methods for finding an accountant is to get a referral from friends, family or business associates. You can also use the California Society of CPA's "Find a CPA" Service."

Do not hesitate to ask your attorney for specific references to other professionals who can be of assistance to you. Often your attorney has direct experience with a number of service providers and is in a good position to give you a referral to a reputable provider. Most importantly, remember that you are not alone. There are many trained professionals who can help you get through this difficult life transition.