

What You Need to Know about Divorce

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Divorce is a transition that deeply affects everyone in the family, including you and everyone who loves you. Although we may think of divorce as commonplace, it is not commonplace to those having to make this difficult transition. It is a life crisis, of greater proportions than anyone going through it would have reason to anticipate.

Divorce has deep legal, financial, emotional and social implications. The process of divorce requires both people experiencing it to navigate the emotional waves that are an inherent part of letting go of relationships that have been meaningful and in many cases have shaped your personal identity as well as provided a financial and social foundation you have come to rely on. You will be called upon to experience emotions and to make decisions you may have never expected. Many decisions will need to be made as you transition from the realities of being a legal, emotional, social and financial partner to establishing security as a single person and, if you have children, as a single parent. Choosing the process that will work best for you and your family is important. The decision of what process to use to resolve all the issues related to divorce will not only affect all of the legal and financial decisions ; it will set the stage for how you put an end to your marriage and how you will feel moving forward.

In our society, people have become accustomed to viewing divorce as an adversarial process, in which each person must choose to defend him or herself against being taken advantage of by the other. Friends and family often feel they must choose sides. An adversarial process can tear apart families and friendships, can compound hurt and anger, and can cause unnecessary misunderstandings and emotional turmoil, making it difficult to move forward in a healing way.

A traditional court process can be appropriate for families in cases where one or both of the members need the structure and protection the court can provide. Other processes now exist, however, for those who want to go about their divorce in a less adversarial way. Many people can benefit from choosing an option that gives them the education and information they need to make informed decisions by working out agreements with each other with the help of trained professionals. Avoiding the court process, if it is not necessary, can offer a format for resolving problems inherent in the divorce process in a way that respects each person and his or her needs moving forward as well as preserving ongoing relationships. This can be extremely beneficial for families where there are children. By working together to resolve issues regarding your children, you and your children's other parent can learn how to develop and maintain a healthy co-parenting relationship.

A new program called DIVORCE OPTIONS, is now being offered statewide and has recently become available in Sonoma County. The goal of this program is to provide information to anyone who wants to learn more about the process of divorce.

The program provides a basic outline of the legal, financial, psychological and social aspects of divorce. It discusses all of the process choices, such as mediation, collaborative divorce, and traditional negotiation and helps you sort out which process can best meet your needs. It gives a thorough look at the pros and cons of each process and outlines the factors to consider when choosing which process to use. This workshop will help you understand how aspects of your own situation will lead to which process may be most helpful.

A team of experienced professionals, including an attorney, a financial specialist and a family counselor teach each session and provide information relative to all aspects of divorce, so that you can be better prepared to deal with the legal, financial and emotional decisions that will arise. As a parent, you will get information about talking with your children about divorce, and what you can do to help your children through the divorce process. Information about what to consider when designing a parenting plan that will work best for their family is also included. In addition, a judicial officer attends briefly to discuss the realities of going to court and to answer questions about the court process.

Divorce Options is offered monthly, the second Saturday of each month from 9 a.m. – 12 noon at The Collaborative Practice Center, 829 Sonoma Avenue, in Santa Rosa. The fee for the program is \$35 with pre-registration, or \$45 at the door. The program fee covers materials offered at each program and assists with paying for advertising. Upcoming programs for this year will be held on: May 10; June 14; July 12; August 9; September 13; October 11; November 8 and December 13. To register, visit www.divorceoptions.eventbrite.com

The Divorce Options Program is a community service sponsored by The Collaborative Council of the Redwood Empire. LGBT welcome. For more information call: 707.523.0570; visit the website at: www.collaborativecouncil.org/divorceoptions.html; or email DivorceOptions@hotmail.com