

Making the Most of Your First Meeting with a Divorce Lawyer

With the prospect of divorce comes a lot of unknown territory that is sure to make you uneasy. While you may think of meeting with a divorce lawyer as your “first step,” the preparation should actually begin before you walk into their office. There are many things you can do to make sure that this first step is as productive and useful as possible and that much of the uneasiness that comes along with divorce remains at bay.

- **Arrive early:** Just like at the doctor’s office, there is usually preliminary paperwork that you will need to fill out prior to your first meeting. Information that is often needed on this paperwork includes: both parties’ full names, contact information, employment and income information, dates of birth, social security numbers, past addresses, as well as applicable information for your children.
- **Prepare a list of questions:** This is a very helpful way to prepare for your first meeting with a divorce lawyer. Once you walk into the lawyer’s office, more likely than not you will be overwhelmed with emotions and the prospect of what is to come. By making a list, you can ensure that you do not forget to ask your most important questions. Some questions that may be helpful include:
 - What is your strategy for my case?
 - Should I consider mediation?
 - If your spouse has retained a lawyer, ask your prospective lawyer whether he or she has worked with this lawyer before. If so, do they know if your spouse’s lawyer tends to settle divorces out of court?
 - Based on what you know about my case, how do you predict a judge would rule on it?
 - What percentage of your cases go to trial?
 - How to I proceed from this point forward?
- **Be prepared for questions your divorce lawyer may ask you:** In order to make sure that your lawyer can serve you to the best of their ability, they will need to be made aware of a lot of your personal information. This is not the time to hide things, because information that is hidden from your lawyer now, will more likely than not only hurt you in the end, such as if your spouse’s lawyer blindsides your lawyer with information that they are not prepared to defend due to your omissions. The following are some questions you may be presented with:
 - Why are you seeking divorce? Is one party at fault (i.e. an affair)?
 - What do you hope to get out of your divorce, financially and otherwise?
 - What are the facts of your marriage, i.e when and where you got married, if there was a prenuptial agreement, have you or your spouse been married before?
 - Will there be any custody or access issues?
- **Review your finances before your first meeting:** Make sure you review all of your family’s household finances, including savings and checking accounts, stocks, debts, etc. prior to your first meeting. This information will be invaluable to your lawyer and lay a lot of the groundwork for your proceedings. If you do not have access to this information, your lawyer can request it once proceedings have begun. Furthermore, be prepared to discuss a budget of what your current household expenses are and what you anticipate them to be after the divorce.
- **Pass on any relevant paperwork:** If you were served with divorce papers, you and your spouse entered into a prenuptial agreement, etc. make sure to bring copies of these documents for your lawyer. Your lawyer will want to review these documents in order to determine how best to proceed. Additionally, if you have questions about these documents, make sure to note them and ask for clarification from your lawyer. If you have been served, make an appointment with your lawyer as soon as possible, as there may be deadlines for responding that may have to be met in order to ensure your rights.

- **Form a collaborative relationship with your lawyer:** In order to get the most out of your relationship with your lawyer, it is best that you participate in a collaborative way with them. Try to be as organized as possible because it is in this way that you can enable your lawyer to be proactive and not reactive to your spouse's lawyer during proceedings. By being prepared during the proceedings, your lawyer can focus on truly advocating for you, as they will have an arsenal filled with all of the relevant information you have provided them with.
- **Ask to discuss a budget for your case:** While it will be hard for a lawyer to tell you exactly what your divorce proceedings will cost, as every divorce is different, your lawyer should be able to tell you how long they anticipate certain steps of the divorce to take. If your resources are limited, make sure to discuss this with your lawyer early on so that it does not become a problem later.

For more information regarding divorce preparation or to schedule a free consultation, please contact Attorney Ed Amaral at 1(800) 290-1012 or at edamaral@amarallaw.com.