

## **A Survivor's Guide to Divorce - (Rita Keevil, Family Law)**

Going through a divorce is one of the most stressful events a person can face. No matter how long your marriage has lasted, divorce brings considerable change and need for adjustment of all aspects of your life. It will be hard to forget the disappointment, anger, betrayal or confusion of the divorce. For this reason, take your time, such a big step should not be rushed.

1. **Be informed and find the right attorney.** Take legal advice *before* you do anything else. You need to know your rights, how the process works and how long it could take. How will a divorce impact on your time and relationship with your children? What financial consequence can you expect? Can you change the locks? Can you stop the car payments? Look for an attorney who has experience in divorce matters, and in life. Choose an attorney who is firm but not unnecessarily aggressive. Your attorney will be your voice and your rock throughout the difficult times.

Inform yourself of your and your spouse's financial position, gather information which may otherwise be kept from you once the divorce process gets under way.

Always be truthful with your attorney, they cannot help you otherwise.

2. **Take care of the children:** The children love both parents and must be allowed to do so. Protect their interests without disguising their interests as your own. Be steady and reliable and keep your promises to your children. Collect them on time and take them home on time. Talk to them, your children are tougher than you think, but, NEVER bad mouth their other parent – the child was made by both of you.
3. **Take care of yourself:** Keep a regular routine that includes down time, sleep and healthy eating. Avoid the bottle – and above all else - stay away from social media.
4. **Surround yourself with a support system:** Divorce may mean you have lost your biggest connection. Besides finding an attorney whom you trust and feel comfortable with, look to your family and friends for emotional support. However, avoid the coffee shop experts and the internet, these will be the greatest thorn in your attorney's effort to help you. You are not living an episode of *Suits* – real life and real litigation is much grimmer. Talk to your church leader, a counsellor or a life coach but take legal advice from your lawyer.
5. **Honey attracts more than vinegar:** People can behave more badly during a divorce than at any other time of their lives. Fighting and character assassination will take you nowhere other than down a long and costly road. You may be in the process of divorce but, if you have children, you are linked for life. Be reasonable, ask nicely. See it as a business transaction. If that doesn't work, use the law to ensure fairness.
6. **Revenge is a dish best avoided:** Studies show that revenge does not produce a sense of satisfaction – it keeps you hanging on, no matter how much fun it may be to consider sewing prawns into the hems of his/her trousers! Revenge can have costly consequences, as it did for the farmer who, furious that the estate was to be divided equally, cut all of his farm tools and machines, and even his cattle, in half. There were no winners there.

- 7. There is life after divorce:** You will have new opportunities and new freedoms. And, if you manage your divorce courteously and reasonably, there will be a better life and you may find yourself to be a better person.