

Advocating for Yourself During a Divorce

3 Tips from a Divorce Attorney By Sarah Lindenfeld Hall

When new clients meet with divorce lawyer Kyleigh A. Weinfurtner, they're likely cycling through one of the emotional stages of divorce. In the beginning, it's often sadness and anger. By the end, they often push forward with a business-like, "let's be done with this," approach. Divorce is a marathon, however, not a sprint. As the saying goes, "Divorce only moves as fast as the slowest person."

"My tagline is, 'We're working towards your new normal,'" says Weinfurtner of Ohio-based Zashin & Rich. To get to that point, Weinfurtner suggests a few tips on how women can advocate for their best interests during a divorce.

Get support

During a divorce, women have a lot to process—emotionally, financially and logistically—and they have some huge decisions to make. Weinfurtner suggests women utilize a therapist or counselor experienced in handling divorce matters to work through their emotions, so that they can think more clearly and make more rational decisions. "It's best to unravel those feelings with a counselor and solid support network, not your divorce lawyer," Weinfurtner says.

But Weinfurtner's recommendation also has a practical side: Talking with a counselor cuts costs—and getting a divorce isn't cheap.

"A lot of times people will use their domestic relations lawyer as their sounding board, which we can be, but that's very expensive," Weinfurtner explains. "There are a lot of emotions rolling around—you want to cry and scream—but you're playing me out of position by using me as a therapist rather than a trained mental health professional."

Focus on life post-divorce

Many women lose sight of the long view when they focus on the immediate "wins" in a divorce settlement, Weinfurtner says. She regularly reminds her clients of this: "There's a life after divorce. What do you want that to look like for you?"

Getting the family home, for instance, might mean you won't have to uproot your kids now. But that home, affordable for a married couple, may be too expensive for a single parent.

"If you want 70 percent of your income going to your house, maybe that makes sense to you," she said. "If you don't, we need to think of a different strategy."

This long-term approach applies to more than just the spoils of marriage, but also to relationships. Is it worth fighting for half of your ex-husband's business, for instance, or is it better to walk away to maintain a civil relationship with him for the kids? The answer depends on each woman's specific situation, she states.

Expect to hate your lawyer—sometimes

As a neutral third party, a divorce attorney can keep the process moving forward. They can dive into the details, ferreting out critical information about a couple's finances and assets. And occasionally, they'll give advice that's hard to hear.

Listen to your lawyers.

"I'm not here to tell clients that they are right," Weinfurtner says. "I'm here to give advice. Sometimes you're going to hate me because you don't like what I'm telling you. But that's my job."

But her job also includes a bit of cheerleading. She regularly gives pep talks to her clients too.

"It may very well suck, but you will get through it," Weinfurtner tells her clients. "There is a light at the end of the tunnel."