



## A Team Approach to Divorce

By Kathleen M. Newman

Kathleen M. Newman has experience in all aspects of marital dissolutions, and has represented individuals on complex matters involving business ownership, valuing professional practices and financial analysis. Kathy sets herself apart through her strong advocacy of custody, support and parenting agreements. A board certified trial advocate in family law, a skilled mediator and a certified life coach, Kathy is also a fellow in the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers. Among her accolades, she has been consistently named a Top 40 Super Lawyer for family law and one of the Best Lawyers in America in family law. For more information, please visit [www.kathynewmanlaw.com](http://www.kathynewmanlaw.com).

As with just about anything in life, getting a project completed is easier when everyone works together in a team. This is particularly true when it comes to life's more challenging situations such as divorce. When clients come to you as their attorney, requesting your assistance in making a referral to a family lawyer, consider encouraging your client to seek out a professional with a "divorce team" in place. The overall outcome for your client is likely to improve as a result of the combined expertise of the various team members who are ready to serve your client.

Like every area of law, divorce has evolved. Changes have happened as a result of changes in the statutes and the development of the appellate cases interpreting these statutes, a more inclusive understanding of what constitutes a family and the increasing complexity of splitting certain assets like business interests and retirement assets. As a result, divorces now involve a series of precise calculations to fairly split retirement assets and investment portfolios as well as a need to accurately value potential business interests – and that just represents the financial side of the divorce proceeding. Myriad issues can arise involving child custody, parenting time and spousal maintenance determinations. As a result, many family law attorneys will recommend pulling other experts into the mix to form a divorce team to best represent a client's interests.

### **Pulling the Team Together**

Although the exact composition of a divorce team will vary depending on the unique circumstances of the divorce, we believe the core team should include:

**An Attorney.** Arguably the most important member, a divorce attorney is the backbone of the team. The attorney will guide the overall divorce process and advocate for their client's rights to better ensure the most favorable outcome. In order to find an attorney that is right for your client's needs, it is wise to refer to one that focuses exclusively on family law issues, including property division, nonmarital assets, antenuptial agreements and child custody. Forbes recently provided some guidance in an article focused on family law issues, noting it was beneficial to find an attorney that is a fellow in the prestigious American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers. This group requires members to have a minimum of 75 percent specialization in matrimonial law and be admitted to the bar for a minimum of 10 years along with other strict requirements.

**Financial Experts.** Articles in both Forbes and Private Wealth Magazine recommend consulting with financial experts during a divorce. These experts are particularly helpful if business interests are involved. Business interests generally require an appraisal when determining the

overall value and division of the marital estate. In addition to valuing the business interests, this professional can often help evaluate potential tax implications that might result from a proposed property distribution. This financial expert, who is often a CPA, can also assist in tracing non-marital assets, and preparing cash flow projections when determining spousal maintenance and child support. An experienced divorce attorney will have strong relationships with financial and business valuation experts and will recommend the best person for your client's unique situation.

**A Parenting Consultant.** For those going through a divorce with young children, a parenting consultant or child specialist may also be included as part of the team. This individual assists in creating a parenting plan that addresses each individual family's unique situation. Topics that a parenting consultant may help a family navigate include parenting time and living arrangements, discipline, family communications, medical and school decisions. Parenting consultants can help a couple resolve ongoing conflicts in these areas so they can better focus on the important job of parenting their children.

**Mental Health Experts.** Some may find it beneficial to include a psychologist, counselor or therapist as part of the team. This professional can help clients cope with the emotional turmoil inherent in a divorce. If children are involved, a child psychologist can often assist the children in making a healthy transition to new living arrangements and parenting routines. William A. Eddy, president of the High Conflict Institute of San Diego, believes that including a mental health professional on a divorce team, "can be helpful in calming emotions, clarifying expectations and helping discuss difficult issues." Should chemical dependency be a struggle for either parent, having a mental health expert as part of the divorce team is also beneficial as they can connect the family to needed treatment and support resources during and after the divorce process.

The most competent and skilled divorce lawyers understand the benefit of the team-based approach and will welcome the opportunity to collaborate with other professionals for the benefit of their client. Clients should make sure their family law attorney is well-versed in the concept of team-based divorces and is well connected to the professionals needed to help them smoothly transition to the next phase of life. Getting a divorce is never easy, but a team of professionals collectively advocating for their clients' interests can help ease the process. Your clients will appreciate a solid referral from you to a fellow lawyer who believes in and practices the team approach.